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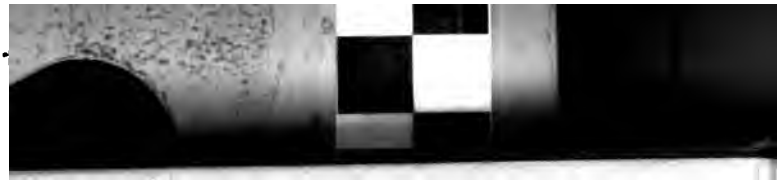
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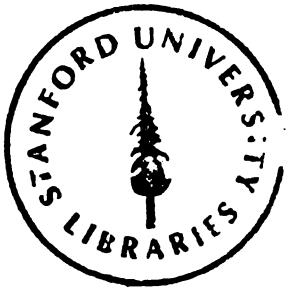
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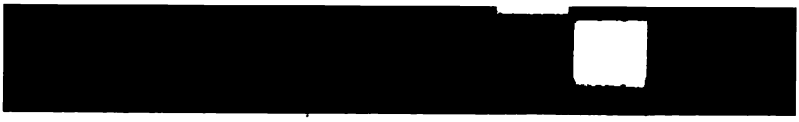



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HORACE BLAKE

By

MRS. WILFRID WARD

Author of "Great Possessions," etc.

G. P. PUTNAM'S SONS
NEW YORK AND LONDON
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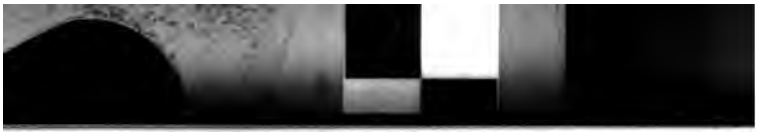
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HORACE BLAKE





PART I



HORACE BLAKE

I

MIGHT IT BE SUDDEN?

IT was the third interviewer that had called in the last hour. He was young, eager, reverential; he wanted to talk to Mrs. Blake as well as to her husband, to gain all the information that he could whether it would prove good copy or not. James Green was a genuine worshipper of genius; unconsciously he always preferred the genius that was in the fashion, and he was borne along in the general current about him, adding little to it but the impetus of his own vitality. Mrs. Blake liked the eager eyes that glanced at her with such honest friendliness; she did not mind the wild hair or the trick of the brown, dusky hand that incessantly pushed back the mane from the very ordinary forehead. Kate Blake did not mind the flashy clothes or the neglect the young man had shown as to his own person. There were many things in the world that she did not take the trouble to object to, and many more that she did not notice at all. She was taller than this boy journalist—a large woman, not quite thin though inclined to be so. James Green said afterwards that she had been designed on the large lines of a Sibyl by Michael Angelo; he seemed to think that Buonarotti, as he

called him, had suggested the type to Nature. An old blouse and a skirt of a past fashion, both, however, very well put on, had no depressing effect upon his view of Kate Blake, which was certainly to his credit.

As he came in she was standing by a desk on which lay a mass of proofs which she was pinning together, giving each chapter a brass fastener to itself with a firm pressure of the large, admirable hands. Green had just shut the door of the room in which he had been interviewing her husband, and she looked up at him with a grave, friendly expression.

"It was good of you to let me see him, Mrs. Blake," he said, "he is in splendid form; can he be always as bright as this?"

"Not always." Her voice was not musical, but it had a force in it that was pleasant.

"Then I am fortunate."

Mrs. Blake looked at a mass of crumpled papers in his hands. "He has been talking to you a good deal," she said; "was it about the last play?"

"No, not the last play, though he was amusing about the censor. No, Mrs. Blake, he was talking to me about his own youth."

"Ah," said Mrs. Blake.

"He has been letting me have some insight into the struggles of a boy genius thrown in the midst of uncongenial society, narrow as the eye of the needle they could n't pass through. Heavens! Mrs. Blake, think of that boy revolting from his nursery days against the credulity of creeds and the frauds of faith —not that I mean he would make use of cheap alliteration."

For at the "credulity of creeds" he thought that Mrs. Blake's eyebrows had risen a little.

"Did he tell you more of his family?"

"His father," said the boy, consulting one of the crumpled papers, "was of a very old family, very much feared and respected, altogether a terrible character."

There was a knock at the door, followed by the appearance of a tall man with a grave, smooth face and a fine forehead.

"Oh, Sir Thomas, I did not expect you this morning." Mrs. Blake turned towards him. "This is good of you. I 'm afraid, Mr. Green, I must send you away as Sir Thomas Goodstone has come to see my husband, but you shall have one of the latest photographs if you like."

A mass of photographs of all sizes and shapes lay on the table.

"I will take this one, please."

The young journalist decided on his choice at a glance; this was the one giving the true presentation of his hero.

Mrs. Blake led him to the door and Sir Thomas Goodstone took up one of the photographs and examined it with a grave, professional scrutiny.

On the landing Green looked back at Mrs. Blake with such an imploring expression that she followed him out of the room.

"He told me that he only needed a few weeks' complete rest to set him up again. May I say that that is Sir Thomas Goodstone's opinion?"

Mrs. Blake's face did not change.

"I do not think it would be quite etiquette; you had better not use Sir Thomas's name without his permission."

"Might I just come back and ask him to let me use his name?"



Mrs. Blake was never impatient with a journalist, never even felt tempted to be impatient.

"Not just at this moment," she said with a large maternal manner as if she were telling a dear child to run away; and the young man soon found himself passing through the hall of the hotel into Dover Street. It was not until he reached the office of the newspaper that he became aware that he had failed to get any definite information as to Horace Blake's state of health.

Mrs. Blake went into the sitting-room—once a most usual hotel sitting-room, now old-fashioned, with its heavy mahogany furniture dark against a staring white and gold paper. She switched on the electric light as the fog in the air had grown thicker. The great doctor turned towards her. He gave a warning glance at the door of Horace Blake's bedroom.

"Come in here," she answered in a low voice, and led him to another door at the farther side of the room. They went into a small, narrow room filled with boxes and a litter of things just unpacked, and of parcels from shops. Sir Thomas kicked against a typewriter that was standing on the floor and jumped a little aside to avoid it.

"I had a long talk with your husband yesterday after the consultation," he said. He knew that she had waited in the next room during that talk, but it was the easiest way to begin.

"Yes," said Mrs. Blake.

"He consented, as you know," Sir Thomas went on, "to take a complete rest; he suggests the coast of Brittany. It is a fine climate and an easy crossing, supposing that he goes from Southampton to Cherbourg by the North German Lloyd. I rather insist

on that because he could not possibly get shaken going that way in one of the finest boats in the world."

Mrs. Blake knew that he knew that she knew all this already. She was more inclined to be impatient with the big doctor than she had been with the little journalist. She was prepared to let him run on like this, but it seemed hard now to make her ask what he knew that she was waiting to know.

"Might it be sudden?" she asked.

"Extremely unlikely." She had put it in the easiest way possible for him.

"Will there be much pain?"

"It will be intermittent; acute perhaps at times, but not, I think, constant."

The courage in the strong face touched him; there was something human in his voice as he said: "You want to ask me how long it may be delayed"—everything was "it" now in their talk, whether pain or disease or death—"and I, with my miserable science, cannot tell you. It is best for him and for you that you don't know."

"Do you think he understood himself?" asked Mrs. Blake.

"I hope not." The manner was more professional.

She did not trouble to tell him that her husband knew the truth perfectly well; she had seen it in Horace's eyes,—indeed that was how she had first known it herself.

"I want you," said Sir Thomas, "to take with you the best man-nurse I know; happily he is just disengaged. I can give him full directions. I think," he added with again a touch of human sympathy, "he will be an immense comfort to you. Shall I send him round for you to see him?"

"Yes, we must find out whether Horace takes to him."

"He is sure to do that," said Sir Thomas genially. "As to the papers, Mrs. Blake, you pay the price of fame; I have had two interviewers to-day and I think we had better settle what to say. Your husband is overworked and needs a complete rest—'ordered by Sir Thomas Goodstone to take a complete rest for some months.'" Did he stumble at the word "months"?

"Will you see him now?"

"No, no, I have nothing to say; don't let him know I have been here," and he moved towards the sitting-room.

Kate Blake's face quivered for the first time at the astonishing stupidity of the man who was ready to again risk passing through the sitting-room. She opened another door on to a back staircase. Sir Thomas looked as if a back staircase were a thing he did not know how to deal with. With an unconscious air of command Kate Blake led the way and took him down to the level of the hall and he passed through a glass door that opened into it.

She returned up the front stairs, which were narrow and dark, for the hotel was old-fashioned and not arranged for display. Its central position made it possible for it to go on unchanged and yet still to demand and get high prices.

She passed through the long narrow sitting-room and turned into the badly lighted bedroom at the back where the electric light had been necessary all the morning.

In the middle of a large bed, canopied with red curtains, leaning against many pillows, was the long

thin person of Horace Blake, his body making sharp outlines under the bed-clothes. He was reading a paper and gave a chuckle as she came near him.

"I have invented for myself in the last week four different fathers, two mothers, and three religions from which I revolted in childhood. I have had six special hobbies, four favourite games, and have given utterance to at least a dozen contradictory blasphemies—you know even blasphemies are not always consistent. But it 's about time I got away, eh?"

She did not make the mistake of being unlike herself with him. "It 's no use playing the ass, Horace."

"But if it amuses me to play the ass? However, I 've done it enough for this visit. It 's great fun coming to London just when you are being boomed; the house was fuller than ever last night. Those journalistic fellows said I could ask anything I chose for the next play. I have n't told them that the second act is practically finished."

"And that the censor will never let it appear," said Kate, smiling.

"Bring me the photographs, I want some for America."

She brought in the pile of many sizes and threw them on the bed in front of him.

"They are not at all like; I told you so when I saw the proofs," she said hastily. She thought he must see in them how terribly he was changed.

He sat up and pushed back the curtain and let the electric light fall full on the photographs. His silk pyjamas fell wide open at the neck and his shrunken arms came far out of the sleeves.

"Not a bad-looking fellow," he said, and chuckled again. The bed was strewn with papers, caricatures,

photographs, letters, press cuttings, all in some way dealing with himself. He might have grown accustomed to it all by now, but he had not, neither had she. Every atom of flattery for him was as fresh to them both as the first roses of summer, and this was the fullest harvest they had ever gathered. His thin hands caressed all that lay before him.

"I suppose there are some attacks you have not given me," he said in the tone of a spoilt child.

"Of course," said Kate bitterly, "the fools are the same as usual, even more so, which shows that you have struck home."

"What will they say when the next comes, eh, Kate?"

"It is very queer," said Kate hurriedly—she could not speak of the future just then—"how differently your work affects different people. Here is a religious paper, which, while recognising you as an enemy, is full of praise for the art of your work, and a signed article by 'L. P.,' who does n't often strain at a camel, saying that you are positively too wicked for the likes of him."

"That 's nothing new," said Horace, smiling.

"I know; and yet after every play I am surprised afresh. How can you make the religious fools you are laughing at put up with you as they do?"

"Well, you see, I always give them two or three characters that they fall in love with."

"But you always show them up or gibe at them."

"The other characters show them up and gibe at them—I don't give any opinion."

"But what you think is plain enough."

"Plain enough that I hate shams and hypocrisy, but each sect is ready to think I mean some other sect

that they happen to hate. They don't know me as you do." He gave half a sigh and half a grunt as he spoke. "And also you don't fall under the glamour of the religious characters. You see, Kate, you don't understand them; how should you? Don't you see that if I had not been religious in my youth, I could never have brought them into existence?" He laughed. "That 's what I gained from the prayers I learned at my mother's knee!"

Kate smiled indulgently. She had wanted to distract him, and she had succeeded.

"Just the spark that sets me aflame when I write of a believer, whereas my present enlightened condition" —he smiled sardonically—"plus a sense of humour, produces the other characters; and if in my knowledge of human nature I insinuate some things I can't say out, the good folk don't read between the lines. It 's left for an old rake like the author of that article to throw stones out of the small window he keeps open in his glass house. Well, in the next play I have let myself go and spoken out plainly enough. I want it published as a book, and then the world can judge between me and the censor. Let the baby of cant and false modesty have its cry out; after that, the thing will be carried through by its sheer force. Now will you order luncheon and some champagne? Old Goodstone does not mind champagne. And would you turn on the water in the bath-room? Oh, yes; one thing more. I shall want a motor this afternoon; will you order it?"

Kate watched h'm quietly as his shrill high voice hurried on; she knew he was afraid of what she might say. The haggard face was turned from her; only once she saw the sharp light eyes give her a furtive glance.



At lunch he ate little, though he said he felt hungry, and she thought he had some twinges of pain; he hardly touched the champagne. In the afternoon he went out in the motor; he did not tell her where he was going. "I must be amused," he had said just before he started. She did not see him again till next morning.

II

YOU HAD BETTER STAY IN LONDON

FURTHER inquiry discovered the fact that there would be a North German Lloyd boat crossing on the following Sunday. It would have been hardly possible to get Horace off on the Wednesday, and the man-nurse, now identified as Roberts, was anxious for a little delay. It was suddenly realised that no one was in a desperate hurry and the week, the longest week Kate ever spent in her life, went on crowded and confused. She threw herself into her husband's mood; indeed, their outlook was almost the same. There was nothing to be done that could make any difference. The best distraction, the best way of playing the game, was still to try to enjoy the things they had always prized. There was still on them the contrast of the poverty and obscurity in which they had spent the first twelve years of their married life. Even now the contrast gave a real savour to the feast offered them. They had had a hard fight and they had conquered.

"A little different from what it used to be, eh?" Horace said on Tuesday morning, handing her a heap of notes. "With whom shall we dine—the Prime Minister, the Duchess, or our actor-manager?"

There had been an intermediate time—the thought was in both their minds—when he had been asked everywhere, as the phrase goes, without her. But now another stage had been reached; people liked to



say they knew them both; it showed more intimacy with him. Each note was almost the same; each hostess had heard that the Horace Blakes were in London; could she be lucky enough to catch them?

Horace was glad to have so easy a topic with which to open their talk. He knew that Kate would not ask him where he had been the night before, but he was always glad to have some pleasant topic ready for her in the morning. Then he had something else to go on to; something not easy to say, something not in tune with the comedy or tragedy they were playing with each other, but something he was determined to say.

Kate Blake was no politician, but she chose the Prime Minister's dinner-party. She liked the dignity of it; besides, it would be good for the actor-manager that they should dine in Downing Street, and the habit of doing what was most useful was quite formed by now.

"The other would have been more fun, but you are quite right," he answered, and he hesitated whether to leave the important thing he had to say till the afternoon. When the afternoon came he decided to leave it unsaid till next day.

That night was his last appearance in the world, and they both enjoyed it. They both—she by an early experience and he by instinct—knew what was really the best thing in human society, apart from the pinchbeck and the morally vulgar. They suffered gladly anybody who appreciated them, but they really enjoyed unaffected intellectual society. It was a large family that inhabited 10, Downing Street, at that moment—a family of the keenest mental activity, and with a certain measure of unworldliness

of their own. To them on the whole another and a future world really mattered more than this one, and tradition and position made certain minor faults unnatural to them.

Kate was well, if severely, dressed; her face was lit with intelligence and softened by the strain under which she was living. She might to-night be taken for a real live woman, and the simplicity with which she enjoyed being talked to about her husband added to the pleasant feminine impression. At one moment of the evening the hostess got an even gentler impression of her guest. The man who had been talking to Mrs. Blake—a distinguished soldier—had left her for a moment to bring a friend to be introduced to her. She stood well as she walked well; and as she stood alone, absolutely unconscious of herself, her eyes were moist.

At that moment she was watching Horace. He was obviously being made much of, eagerly listened to, talking well. Talking was not really his gift. The group were at a little distance from her. It came over her in an overpowering wave that this was the last time she would see him thus. She had brought him there, had had this life's job in hand, to nurture his genius and make the world bow before it. She did not value society, the actual converse with any group of human beings, as anything compared to a big widespread fame that might echo through the ages. She even valued sheer newspaper fame above social success. She valued this as part of what they had won. Now it had come to an end. It had nothing to do with sickness or death. She did not think of herself apart from him in such a matter. Society would never be of interest to her if he were not there.

He suddenly looked round and gave her a glance, and she knew that he was in pain, and moved on to say "Good-night" with unconscious dignity. He looked at her with appreciation. They thought chiefly of each other as they went away.

"That is one of the doors that would be shut to us if I published this last play," he said irritably, as the taxi moved on.

"If?" exclaimed Kate.

"When," he corrected. "Ah!" and the pain had him in its grip.

He passed a very bad night—one of the worst Kate had yet watched him through—the most restless and miserable.

Next morning there was much the same mass of things on his bed as the day before, only more notes and telegrams from private friends. There were some magnificent roses in a jug near the bed; the room was lighter than yesterday, and the spring sunshine made some way into the little back-yard, and was reflected from an opposite window. Horace only looked the more haggard and feverish.

"Surot wants to paint me. Would you tell him that I can't give him any sittings until I come back again?"

"You could not give him one this week?"

It was in both their minds that it would be a valuable thing—a portrait by Surot—a portrait for futur ty, a thing not to be missed. But they were treading on thin ice.

"I 'm afraid," said Kate, "he will be away all the rest of the year; he is going back to Hungary in August."

He knew that she meant: "It is worth while to make an effort for this; this picture will add to your posthumous fame." And he made the effort to risk all the thoughts that this last portrait must bring, for the sake of the fame they had worked for together. He went to Surot's studio, and had a bad half-hour—some physical pain and much mental suffering—for he saw in Surot's eyes, as he worked, and the artist became too absorbed to have any disguises in his face, that he knew he was painting a man under sentence of death.

"It must be very interesting," he thought to himself. And then as an experiment he managed to catch Surot's glance, and he looked at him very straight into his eyes. Surot for a moment was too absorbed to notice; after that he blushed.

"*Il suo fato un segreto d'altrui,*" said Horace in a light undertone, but Surot apparently did not know Italian. Only Horace felt he had scored off the artist and kept him in order. He had asserted his rights against the painter's obsession in studying his physical conditions.

He was excessively tired when he got back to the hotel. Roberts—the man-nurse recommended by Sir Thomas—had arrived. He suggested that Horace should go to bed, which Kate would hardly have dared to do. Four hours' rest before he dined out meant four hours without distraction. But the upright, vigorous figure standing ready to help him seemed attractive. Horace leaned on his arm and went into the bedroom. Roberts undressed him and put him to bed like a child. Once, unnoticed by them both, Kate stood in the open doorway, and for a few moments stayed watching. There came over her the

perception that that part of her task had been taken from her. It had been part of what she had undertaken—the physical care of him. She had been the stronger and had not felt it hard. She did not know if she minded being superseded in this or not; she did not question herself, she simply recognised the fact, and with her left hand she lightly touched the muscles in her right arm that had lately so often held him up when he was in pain. Meanwhile the skilled hands of the trained nurse had given him a new sense of relief, and he began talking to Roberts in a more cheerful voice. Roberts came into the drawing-room to fetch him some tea, and it seemed strange to Kate to have even so little a thing done for her. About six o'clock the man reappeared.

"Mr. Blake would like to see you."

She felt it to be a state visit when Roberts held the door open for her.

As soon as they were alone Kate knew that something was wrong. Horace was going to tell her something fresh. He was sitting up in bed, supported by pillows, evidently more easy of body. But there was a flush on the wasted cheeks, and there was an expression she knew well of set obstinacy and shamelessness about the mouth, while the great light eyes were at the same moment both furtive and defiant. Kate's heart sank, not with a quick strong emotion, but with the dulness of experience. What had he done now? Had he achieved, broken as he was, some fresh iniquity? Would there even now be the usual task of trying to patch up some scandal? Whom had he overreached in money matters? Or was it still possible that he had injured some woman to whom Kate must make amends? Always she had followed in his wake, per-

suading to silence, bribing when needful, saving him the consequences of his actions. Her heart was too old and dull by this time to feel what it used to feel; her pulse was slow, only she knew she would go on striving, contriving, making the patches to fill the rents of the worn garment of his reputation. And she had kept the worn garment together in an amazing way until now, when the end was very near.

"I want to speak to you," he said, as he had so often said it before. Kate stood expectant, patient, calm; he knew without raising his eyes what she looked like, and felt afraid of her—afraid of the unconscious greatness of the way in which she stood expectant. At last he went on in a shrill voice:

"I was thinking about your plans," he said. "Don't you think that you had better stay in London while I am away? It would be less dull for you than going home. I 'm afraid I must leave you a lot to do. I shall have to leave the two first acts of this last play entirely in your hands to be copied and revised, and then there are all the proofs for the new edition of my collected works."

He might just as well have repeated over and over, "I don't want you—I don't want you," as have gone on saying the other things, for the sense of that "I don't want you" was what rang loudly in Kate's ears. Several ideas were presented at the same moment to her mind. First, that from experience she knew what going away from her meant in the past, the holidays he took that left a trail of shame and trouble behind them. Then there was the horror of his falling entirely into the care of hirelings who might get tired of him and his suffering, for he was not an easy patient; he might tire out the strongest.

Besides, there was her own side of it, her awful failure at the end of all her care. He did not want her, and that was the great failure. Again, the world meant most to her for him, but it meant something for herself. What would their world think of her allowing him to go away to die?

"I want to get a thorough rest out there as soon as I have written one act more."

She thought suddenly that she understood. The idea of some new scandal faded. No, he wanted to go away from her because while he was with her he would see her as a witness to the truth that he was dying. If he went away with Roberts, there would be no effort, no pretence, nothing but rest and the possibility of deluding himself, perhaps of getting to hope. Roberts seemed to exude the idea that only fear was unreasonable. To go away and get better, his silence seemed to insist, was the only reasonable view of the matter.

She understood, and she never even asked herself if she forgave. But Blake moved uneasily. He had more to say that was very difficult to say to Kate.

"Would you give me the novel I left in the sitting-room, and a paper-knife?"

Kate brought the book.

"How about Trix?" Horace asked abruptly, as she came near the bed. She had been wondering if he wanted to see Trix before he went away, but Trix had passed to a great distance from her mind during the last quarter of an hour. Trix was the only child, now nearly eighteen years old.

"I have been so busy I have not written to her for nearly a week." Kate spoke in a tone of self-reproach.

She was very seldom startled, but she was startled by the next thing Horace said.

"I think I shall take her abroad; it would amuse her."

A hot colour spread over his wife's neck and face. Horace looked at her angrily. They agreed about so many things, and they had agreed tacitly not to see much of Trix. And Kate had registered a vow long years ago that Trix should never learn to know what Horace had taught to her. She was almost overwhelmed at last.

"The child has done enough lessons," grumbled Horace. "She would enjoy Brittany, and the air would do her good; why grudge her a little amusement?" And at the same moment his eyes held a very storm of reproach in their light depths.

"Can you grudge this *to me now?*" he seemed to say. Meanwhile the full horror of the idea swept over Kate. To send a child of not quite eighteen, knowing nothing of sickness, to be with him in agonies of pain, possibly to be alone with him and a man-hireling when he should die. Even if the worst did not happen, to be absolutely alone with Horace, the Horace she knew in his worst moods, the Horace she knew when he was furiously revolting, when his whole mind seemed to be one desperate blasphemy, when he showed himself what the majority of mankind would call simply a lost soul. She looked at him, the wreck on the bed, whose genius to her blazed brighter than ever, whose success added a glory to his strange, intelligent, mysterious, mocking face, and then she thought of the child. It seemed to her that the frantic hatred against all the powers that rule the destiny of man,

the demonic force of his dramatic work was turned for the moment against herself.

"Kate, if——"

"Take her," was the low answer; and then came a touch of submission. "It will be a nice change for her." The banal words were spoken, and Horace's eyes lit up with triumph.

"Send Roberts to me," he said imperiously. Then he checked himself. "Come here"—he held out the thin, feverish hand. "I 'll not teach her to blaspheme and I 'll not teach her to pray, Kate; and I 'll be as prudish a chaperon as any finishing governess."

It hurt horribly that he could say so crude, so horrid a thing as that. His face lowered at the way in which she took his little advance. She saw it, and pulling herself together she smiled at him. "I will have her up to-morrow to get some really good clothes."

"Let me take her away in perfectly-cut blue serge, and an ideal travelling-hat—spend plenty of money, Kate, the royalties are crowding in."

Kate rang for Roberts, who appeared at once, and then she left them and went into the drawing-room. She sat down by the fire in a low chair and held out her hands to the blaze which had been unnecessary all day, and which now could not send her any warmth that she could feel. Then with a gesture of despair she covered her face with the cold fingers. It was too much; she thought she knew all she could suffer before this, and she was startled at the new misery. Horace left her and took Trix. Trix, whom he had so seldom wanted to see at all; he had been absolutely careless of Trix. Trix had grown up with Kate's sister, Anne Coniston, because Horace and Kate had agreed

that it was best. Now she must write to Anne and say that Trix was to go abroad alone with Horace. Kate had for a long time thought that she would never feel anything with the quivering pain of full vitality again, but she did feel it now. If Horace were capable of generosity, of common gratitude, he could not have done this. There were so many reasons why it was an insult—a special insult to Kate. She almost thought she hated him, she was ready to hate him. Then faintly but unmistakably came the sound of a groan through the folding-doors. She sprang up. Horace was in pain again; she must go to him. How could she be sure that the hired nurse would be gentle enough, would care enough? She moved towards the door and her fingers were just touching the handle when Horace laughed a loudish chuckle. Evidently Roberts had amused his patient. She turned back; a terrible revolt seized upon her, a hatred of the whole world, of the great dumb, relentless powers. Her father had schooled her into an open-eyed submission to the dimly discerned powers that rule the universe, but to-night that submission was impossible. She sat down again with eyes that did not see fixed on the wall opposite to her with its ugly white-and-gold paper. She saw the pattern for days afterwards with tiring distinctness when she shut her eyes, though she did not notice it at the time.

Then Kate began to realise that she had been making an ideal of Horace's last weeks upon earth. She had pictured to herself a wholly dignified close to that stormy existence. The doctors had said that the latter part of the mysterious illness which they could but half diagnose would very likely be without acute pain. Horace had always been dependent on her for

sympathy and encouragement in his work; and latterly he had been dependent on her for all his needs. She had foreseen weeks of peace, however sorrowful—weeks in which honour and fame would be his; and honour could not have been his if she had not hidden much from the world. But he had always been unaccountable; the unexpected was the only thing to expect from him, and it would be so to the end. Surely it seemed natural that he should cling to her now if ever, and yet now he turned away. His daughter was just old enough to amuse him, to give him some distraction. Kate could never distract him as well.

But could she, ought she to yield to him? She had a will strong enough to get her own way. She could insist on going with him, on nursing him, caring for him to the end. No doubt he would submit; and then she felt the thing to be too dangerous. Something bigger than she could put into words warned her not to force her power. She knew he was not as other men; the old habit of telling herself that he could not be like ordinary men reasserted itself. The larger policy of submitting to this horror came at first vaguely, then clearly to seem the better thing. She grew calmer; now she saw consciously the rug, the shining ormolu grate and fire-irons, and she noticed that the cat was lying near her feet. The flowers and the round, beautifully-marked back of the cat soothed her. Everything else was almost painful. She leaned back; the habits of nearly twenty years had left a physical impress on her brain, and her thought began to move in its accustomed channels. She told herself for the thousandth time that if Horace was a bad man he was also a very great one. To his genius he had been true. He had promised her to succeed and he

had succeeded. The obsession of her life had been his genius, his success. She had had great compensations. She would infinitely rather have had all the suffering he had given her than have been cooped up as the wife of some little insignificant good man. Without her Horace would never have given what he had given to the world. She, too, was responsible for having enriched the thought of mankind, for having brought to perfection one of the glories of the human race. In her agitation the unspoken depths of her life found vent, and summed it all up in words. The exhausted mind became calmer, and then came the softening of the heart. Horace was dying; the dying may be more irresponsible than the looker-on can see. The most loving turn from their best beloved in certain states of disease. Would she be harsh; would she fail to understand now? The larger way of the greater affections was swallowing up the agony of personal pain.

She rose, and quietly wrote to her sister to send Trix up to them next day, to prepare for going abroad. She had just then the selfless look of a mother who has determined that a suffering child must have its way as being the lesser danger in his condition. She moved gently, and there was a certain peace in the great anguish of her face. In cases of delirium the patient's muscles are capable of stronger action than in a state of full consciousness. So with Kate the sudden shock of Horace's announcement had produced a state in which her capacity for suffering was much above its normal condition. When she returned to her usual state of self-control, the pain was dulled, the actual vitality was lower. Horace's wife was a much older woman than her years warranted.



III

THEY ARE SUCH STRANGE EYES

KATE turned away as the train passed out of sight. There had been one less wave of Horace's grey felt hat than she expected, and now she could see no more on account of the curve of the line. The smile on her lips had been obliged to stay so long that it seemed to have become settled. With the habit begotten of long poverty she began to think how to get back by any way except that of taking a taxi. Then she remembered that it did not matter. There was enough money now for as long as he should need it. She took her taxi and told the man to go to Caxton House, where she had business, but she had mistaken her strength. She had not the self-control to do business quite at once. After paying the driver of the taxi she walked very slowly on and made her way to St. James's Park. There were green grass, quiet, and a soft breeze. She sat down on a bench and leant her elbow on her knees. No one was passing and she was able to cry. Through all those long years they had seemed really necessary to each other. Though she had had very much to forgive, she had known that she would forgive much more, not by any reason or virtue apparent to herself, but because he was entirely the occupation and interest of her life. Now it was over and incredibly enough he was still alive. A hireling could nurse him, a child could be a better companion to him. The great doctor had been

amazed at her not going with her husband—amazed and shocked. Long after, when he came to know something of Horace Blake's married life, he thought he understood, but he was wrong. It was not that Kate would not have nursed Horace for many years, for as long as life remained in him, but it was that Horace had come to feel that he could not bear to have her near him. Kate, without putting it into words, had understood him better than he understood himself. Horace was deadly tired and his wife represented to him the fearful energy with which they had worked together. It was she who had cut him off from his own natural surroundings and from his first friends, and now he hankered after something different, he did not quite know what. At moments he said to himself that he must rest, and that she would never let him rest; at other moments he thought that it was because he wanted companionship that would be fresh and young, he felt that he wanted to be a boy again, and he could not be young if that worn, anxious face were watching him with infinite pity and foreknowledge of the end. Yet Horace at last was astonished that Kate did not insist on coming with him; a little bitter, unfair thought had come into his mind and been dismissed. "There is nothing more to be got out of me and she knows it." Then he was ashamed, and her brave smile as she stood on the platform during those last moments together had touched him acutely. Even then he felt urgently that he must go away without her, that he could not bear her to come too. Probably this was due in part to some effect of the disease, it seemed to be beyond his control.

Kate let herself cry, knowing it was better so, for



when the capacity for tears had quite gone the pain of thought would be far worse. She was surprised to find that she could cry. She had not cried for so many years. Her wet fingers felt strange, and the salt, damp smell of the tears. She saw his face full of light filled with pleasure at getting away, at the brightness of the morning, at the intense excitement in Trix's face. But a few minutes before he left, his eyes had met hers and a look she could not read had come into them, something gentle, tender, haunting. His eyes had always had so much power over her. "They are such strange eyes," she thought, "they hold so much light." She was trying to imprint the face on her memory, the face that she might, perhaps, not see again. She did not think for one moment of the possibility of a future life, even to discard it; neither was she now in revolt at her destiny—she took it all without much analysis or self-pity. Her pain, after the one outbreak of nearly a week ago, had been a dull one, almost a half-awake pain, and yet none the less heavy or infinitely wearisome. She did not mean to dwell upon her pain—to be weak or morbid about it. In her scheme of life suffering had no ritual, no observances. She and Horace had once been amused when Trix as a small child asked them: "What is the use of mental pain?" The use! How could there be any use in it? She meant now to be busy; she would, as he wished, stay on in London. She would correct the new edition of his novels and essays. She would type the latest thing he had done—the two first acts of the unfinished play; she would see people; she would do all the things that were useful. Even if he were to die now his mind

would be left in his works, and she would live to see his fame grow greater and greater. The thought strengthened her, the thought of his fame; it was her ideal and her idol.



IV

THIS WILL DO ME GOOD

HORACE BLAKE and Trix were nearing Southampton.

"Is my hat straight, father?"

"No, by no means; yes, now that is better. You look almost worthy to travel with Roberts."

"He is very smart, and he has a nice face."

It was tacitly understood that Roberts was to be considered simply as a valet.

Trix was tall and very fair, with dark brown eyes. The contrast between her hair and her eyes was very attractive. She was dressed as well as could be done when clothes had to be got ready in three days. She had no experience in putting her things on really well, but she had instinct and grace. Her father was delighted with his travelling companion. After that moment of deep feeling when his eyes met Kate's, he had almost at once felt the relief he had expected in being without her. She was the visible embodiment of anxious foreboding, of stern conscious strength in darkness. With Trix he could play that none of it had happened or was happening, while the professional cheerfulness of Roberts need not be analysed.

Horace was feeling very well. Even if he had been told the truth he could have disbelieved it that morning; and as he had not heard it in words—only read it distinctly in the faces about him—he could really put it from him. He had not been abroad for

three years, and the passage from Southampton to Cherbourg was new to him. The sea breeze was glorious without being too cold. The little tender, heavily loaded, a clumsy little affair, put out into the Solent. Horace was fascinated by the shipping, intoxicated by the lightness in the air. Roberts firmly held out his fur coat, and he got into it, too happy to grumble. They had to go farther than they expected, and chose every big boat in the distance as the one they were aiming at, until at last something bigger still came in sight. Trix, who had slipped off to the side of the boat, came back smiling.

"That man was telling his wife that Horace Blake was believed to be on board, and she said she must see you, father." Her eyes danced with pleasure for a moment.

Then they began to realise the vast and monstrous object they were approaching—storey above storey the mighty thing stood over them. Trix caught her breath at the sudden sensation given by the impression of huge size. Its population of men and women had crowded to the sides and were looking down, and German was heard in a confused murmur.

"They are going from Bremen to America," said Horace.

Trix felt awestruck at this thought of the crowd of men, women, and children in some crisis of their lives, coming from—to her—the unknown, and going to another unknown land beyond. The little English girl seemed almost irritated that this huge affair had nothing to do with England. Of the few that went on board with them, not half a dozen were English. This triumph of progress was German and its objective was America. A crowd of men in uniform received

them on the ship, and then they were told to stand aside. Immediately, with amazing order and rapidity, strong men brought on board a perfect cargo of provisions, from fish and greens to hot-house grapes. The luggage, the mails, the stores were brought on and disposed of with an organisation worthy of a Kitchener.

"Very good order," said Roberts unwillingly.

The ship started, and Trix and her father stood on the highest deck and watched the Isle of Wight until they had passed The Needles. Then the huge monster stopped, and the crowd ran again to the side and talked eagerly in German.

"Come and see the pilot leave the ship," said her father.

"So this huge thing can't get through the Solent without that little Englishman," cried Trix.

That old, eternal pathos of the pilot leaving the ship caught Horace's imagination. So many ships in life, in human affairs, had to drop their pilots and go out into the vast deep. The hundreds of passengers who crowded to look at him seemed to feel a touch of awe. Then the great monster roused itself from its stillness, and many bells rang to announce food. It was a vigorous, badly-dressed, joyous crowd of strong men and women and noisy children.

"The coming race," said Horace. "Vigorous, cheerful, affectionate, not self-conscious, not anxious to know if their hats are straight. Once upon a time the English were like that. Look at those women."

Two girls with bright handkerchiefs tied round their hair, with badly-made blouses, with shiny belts and full, clumsy skirts were walking between two men, square and large-faced. They were talking and laugh-

ing, evidently sure of an unfastidious admiration from the men.

"Extraordinarily vigorous," Horace went on. He was teasing Trix; she was ready to flare up.

"Not a suffragette among them, you bet; they all have the look of women who have just scrubbed the floor and are hungry for sausages. Those are the people who will oust us from the first rank among the nations."

"Father, you are horrid, and it 's only these second-class shop people who look like that. Come and see the people in the steerage." She made him walk to the other end, and then he looked with astonishment at the crowd below them. A seething mass of black-eyed, black-haired men and women and children, making a great noise, moving constantly, and at every movement dropping orange-peel or hair-pins or paper-bags, while tall, fair, smart sailors incessantly swept up the refuse with long sweeps of their brooms.

"Those," said Horace, "my dear, are the exiles of the world; they are Jews. The conquering race does not love them at all."

Then they went up again to the first-class deck and lay back on the long chairs. Horace sniffed the glorious air and put his thin hands on the rug over his knees to feel the warmth of the sun, and presently he fell asleep. Trix's fascinated gaze was fixed upon the crowd of white birds and their endless activity; it was impossible to imagine anything more exquisite, she thought. Presently, looking round, she saw that her father was asleep. The glory, the intoxication of the sea and the white birds and the blue sky had hold of her. That is one of the greatest moments of life, when, after a monotonous routine of daily lessons,

during which the world seems cramped about our youth, it is suddenly allowed a vast horizon. Trix's youth had been quiet almost to severity, and only such know the huge joy of the first vision of a larger life. She had little beyond the sense that her father was taking her for this wonderful holiday, that he needed a holiday and they were to make holiday together. A motherly-faced young German pressed her sister's arm as they passed the two chairs. Horace's face was terrible in his sleep; the child's was as brilliant as the white birds and the blue sky. The two young women shook their heads and their kindly eyes met with a look of sympathy and pity.

When Horace woke he shivered. Roberts, who had not been far off, brought him some hot tea. His face brightened and he drew in a deep breath.

"This will do me good," he said. "I 've half a mind to go on to America."

V

SURELY I CAN'T HAVE FORGOTTEN IT?

THE sacristan's house at St. Jean des Pluies joined the church, sticking out from it at an obtuse angle. Between the outer walls of the south transept and the chancel there was a little corner of garden, having the sacristan's house as a third side to it. Here grew a few flowering shrubs, and white irises, and some red roses which flourished and received little attention, yet the corner was not wild or weedy. It did not receive enough rain under those old walls, nor was it given enough manure, to be prolific of weeds. The walls of the church were stern and grey and weather-beaten, almost the colour of the rocks on the coast, rocks that knew what the sea could be in her very worst moods. The limits of the little garden were shaped by the straight wall of the transept, and the bold, round wall of the chancel and the uncertain, rough, uneven wall of the sacristan's house.

Looking in at the sacristan's house—the door was always open—you saw the rough, earthen floor, the oak table and strong chairs, and across the corner, filling up a large space, a splendidly-polished cupboard with shining brass fittings. The bed (almost a coffin-bed) in the living-room recalled Scotland; the wardrobe was intensely Breton. The sacristan said that she had once been two sisters, now she was only one. She said, "It made a great emptiness in the evenings, but if it was the good God's will?——"



The day began with Mass at five o'clock, for which she lit the candles, made the responses and rang the bell. At seven o'clock there was often a Requiem, sometimes a wedding, and occasionally there was a Requiem as late as eight o'clock. But usually towards eight o'clock, the late, lazy hour, the day became less interesting, and there was hardly anybody to be found in church. That was the time at which she took her coffee and a piece of bread. The sacristan's face was narrow and thin; the eyes and mouth were sweet, but the nose sharp. There was nothing of the pietist about the sacristan, no thin, sour wine of affectation, but there was a bit of French human nature in the imperiousness of her official attitude. She tapped you sharply on the shoulder when she wanted one *sou* for a chair, or two *sous* for two chairs, one to kneel and one to sit on. She looked at a half-franc given for change suspiciously; and she gave to those beneath her—two strong women who pulled the heavy ropes that made the bells ring—small sums in a haughty manner.

She made great distinctions between those above her. M. le Curé was supremely first; then, a very long way below him, M. le Vicaire, and then at a far less distance, M. le Sous-Vicaire, who was a polished preacher. But then there were also the priests of the *retraite*, for at St. Jean des Pluies there was a fairly large presbytery, and sometimes one or two priests, who had been chaplains to exiled convents, or were too old to work, lived with M. le Curé on their very meagre retiring pensions. The sacristan held them all in contempt. They were no good to M. le Curé. They ate more than they paid; to her thinking they only cumbered the ground and gave trouble to all concerned. The sacristan was haughty to those

old men, hustling them, for some plea of dusting, out of the *prie-dieu* chairs she thought they preferred.

"*Tiens!* he looks well-fed at the expense of M. le Curé," she would say to herself (she was too prudent to say such things to anybody but herself) of a fat one; or, "His nose is red enough from the good wine of M. le Curé,"—of a thin one.

But there was one just now living in the presbytery whom she particularly disliked. She always spoke of him as "*le tout petit*" in tones of withering scorn. "*Le tout petit*" was white-haired, neat, with a vague, lost look in his eyes. There seemed to be nothing spiritual in the face of "*le tout petit.*" He had a way that exasperated the sacristan of looking curiously at the congregation when he said "*Dominus vobiscum,*" and for the culmination of what should not be done after Mass, he would take up the Chalice and begin saying "*Ave Maria*" as he turned away from the altar, again looking at the congregation as he slowly descended the altar-steps. Indeed, he was not on his knees in the proper place for saying the first *Ave Maria* until he had got to the second. Happily he said the eight o'clock Mass, so she did not often see him do these things. Then "*le tout petit*" did nothing all day but wander about aimlessly, with the air of one who could not take the trouble to look at the people he met, although he looked at them in that odd, inquisitive way from the sanctuary.

Seeing him wander by while she was beating and shaking her feather bed, or chopping her wood, or fetching pails of water annoyed her excessively. He never knew what was happening; he was just the same as usual on the day on which the fishermen went down to St. Malo to start for Newfoundland or Iceland;

while anybody else would be wondering how many of them would ever hear the *cloches de chez nous* again except in dreams. He would ask for whom was a requiem being sung, when everyone else knew every detail of the last illness of the good soul who had passed away. The only thing that really troubled him was to lose his breviary. "He does n't pay too much attention when he is reading it," she thought. He had a trick of losing his breviary, and more than once she had kept it hidden from him for a couple of hours just to make him more careful. It was maddening the way in which he would wander up to her door, and demand in his grand manner if the sacristan had seen his book in the church. There was a dim, vague air of authority about his way of asking for it. She supposed he had caught that way when he was M. le Curé himself, but he might have learned to drop it by now. The sacristan was greatly troubled at times about all this. She went to confession to the *sous-vicaire*, and he was not happy about it; he made her understand that such feelings grow upon anybody if not checked. M. le Curé was the favourite confessor for all classes, but it went against her sense of their official relations to confess to him; it was hardly customary. M. le Vicaire was everybody's friend, was about everywhere, knew everything that was going on, heard six versions at least of every story. He knew one's sins before one got into the confessional. He lost his temper with people who behaved badly, and then made up again with great big shakes of the hand. He was a jolly fellow, and sang songs, and was good like a piece of bread. On the whole, she preferred as a confessor, though not as a friend, the more conventional *sous-vicaire*, whose sermons were

polished, though they had not the rather wild eloquence that the *vicaire* indulged in at times, for that good comrade the *vicaire* was a poet and a friend of Théodore Botrel.

The *vicaire* loved all the lore and the poetry of the wild richly-coloured coast. He gloried in such words as "The sea hath lifted up her voice"; he knew what the voice uplifted by the sea could mean to watchers on that perilous coast. His imagination was giddy sometimes with all the imagery of the liturgy, and all the pageant of Nature. But if there were one moment in the year more dear to him than another it was the blessing of the fields on Rogation Days.

It was a singularly glorious morning, the last of the three Rogation Days, and the little procession started soon after six o'clock. Away in the houses near, the lazy were roused by the distant responses—"*Miserere nobis*," "*Libera nos, Domine*," "*Te rogamus audi nos.*"

But for the most part people were out at work. Some of them had already been to Mass at five o'clock and were not able to follow the procession. A little straggling line of women followed M. le Vicaire and the processional cross, and the lights which took turns to be blown out by the wind and re-lit from the survivors. First they passed round the near fields where potatoes were grown for the English market, through a nursery garden by the cemetery, across a field of lucern towards the sea. The tide was low; a hundred islets of rock stood out a warm brown in the deep green-blue of the waves. There was white campion in the slits of the rocks and pink sea-thrift and creeping yellow weeds and red sorrel, and masses of golden lichen on their sides. The jealous sea was lapping its praises on the white sands. Down steps hewn in the

rocks went the little procession, then along the sands for a short distance, and up again. As soon as they came out on the little path that lay between the fields and the cliff, the *vicaire* checked the litany, and another chant burst out in his big musical voice.

At the low white hotel a gaunt figure, that had risen from a tumbled bed, was leaning out of the big window. Horace Blake was utterly glad that the night was past; he filled his lungs with the air, and then his ear caught faintly the tones of the litany. A moment later came more distinctly the "*Ave Maris Stella.*" He leaned out, but could see nothing but the tops of the trees in the hotel garden and the sea and the farther islands.

"'Ave Maris Stella, Dei Mater alma,'" he murmured. "I can't catch it. . . . Ah! now I can . . . 'Funda nos in pace.' . . . Surely I can't have forgotten it? Now it is louder."

"Solve vincla reis,
Profer lumen cæcis,
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce."

It became fainter; the procession was moving farther off. He was not sure if he heard or remembered one more line:

"Mites fac et castos."

He covered his face with his hands. It was over twenty years since he had heard those words.

He had a pleasant impression as of an almost forgotten scent or a bit of some once long ago familiar landscape. But Roberts coming in with coffee found him scowling at the glory of the world seen through the big, open window.

VI

HE DID NOT WANT ME

ANNE CONISTON was going up to London to see her sister, Kate Blake. She went up chiefly to see her, but she would have gone up anyhow to get news of Trix.

Anne did not love her brother-in-law—far from it—and so she had to go very carefully in dealing with Kate. She agreed with Kate on nearly all subjects except Horace Blake. To her it seemed extraordinary that Kate, brought up by the same stern father as herself, could sink to many of Horace's ideas. It seemed to Anne that it was essential to one who did not believe in religion to be more strict, less self-indulgent, than the believer. The wild element in Horace that overbore any theory of restraint was abhorrent to her. She liked his intense proclamations of candour, of courage, of contempt for lies. But she wanted this attitude justified as it had been justified in her father by a stern code of duty. Yet she was proud of Blake's genius and had great sympathy with Kate's flaming pride, an almost silent white flame of pride, in his achievements. She had intense sympathy with the way they had worked and had succeeded, but it had been for Kate's sake, emphatically not for Horace's sake, that she had made a great effort, and had undertaken to give a home to Trix excepting for the holidays. The holidays were at no fixed dates, nothing ever could be fixed that

depended on Horace Blake. Sometimes the holidays had come to very little in the course of the year. Anne had fostered the child's pride in her father, as it was part of her code. But Trix knew quite well that Aunt Anne did not like Father, and it puzzled her in Aunt Anne; it was so very stupid of her not to appreciate him.

Anne's educational system had been healthy for the body, and the mind had been fed with nothing silly—only great things in literature and history. There was nothing sentimental, nothing but a conscientious kindness in that education. Trix had not known other girls, and yet she had been fairly happy, which was really a triumph for Anne's methods. Anne had the power of suggestion which is the gift of the educator. Trix's "difficult" moods were usually of short duration, being subdued to the atmosphere of cheerful common-sense. Hungry, unsatisfied feelings there must have been, but they seldom reached the stage of complete recognition. There was hardly any outside influence to counteract Anne's influence. Their quiet life had not been varied by some of the occupations that are most usual to women of their class in the country. Trix had never decorated a church for Christmas or for a harvest festival, or helped to get up a village entertainment. They knew very few neighbours and saw little of them.

And now Trix had been caught up and taken away like a parcel to travel alone with Horace. It was incredible. Anne felt it hard that she had had the work and the trouble of bringing up this child, and then should be ordered to put her fresh, untried youth into the hands of Horace Blake. If he needed a

complete rest, why should not Kate take him away to get it? Anne submitted in silence, but as she prepared to go up to London a week after Trix had left her, various things that it would be a relief to say to Kate suggested themselves to her mind.

Anne had boiled the water for her tea. She did many things for herself, having but one little servant, and was sitting at breakfast clad in her neatest coat and skirt, ready to go to London, when she heard the gate of the garden creak, and looking through her latticed window saw Kate walking up the red-tiled pathway between the wallflowers and primulas. The door was open, and Kate was in the room before Anne could get up. They were glad to meet, and Anne was glad that Kate had felt her cottage and garden to be an irresistible attraction, and had so forestalled her by coming down by an early train; but she was a little sorry not to have her day in London.

Both sisters were tall; they had good figures and held themselves well, but Anne was smaller and less defined in every way than Kate. They spent the morning in the garden, and Kate read Horace's letters aloud, and they spoke of indifferent things, and sprayed the green-fly off the buds that would become roses in June. Instinct had suddenly put a gag on Anne's mouth; she could only speak of what Kate spoke of. Then they lunched on salad and spinach and cheese and fruit, with a great deal of black coffee, for they had digestions to be envied. At last, having done all the things they usually liked doing at the cottage, they walked under the trees at the edge of the common.

"You understand," said Kate quite suddenly, "no one else must understand that Horace is dying."

"I did n't understand," faltered Anne. The sunshine suddenly dazzled her; it was a great shock. She trembled, and, turning, sat down at the foot of the nearest tree. Kate looked at her kindly. She described in a low, even voice what the doctors had told her.

"It is all Drood's fault," she said bitterly. Drood was the little doctor who had attended Horace before he went to the specialist. "The diet has been wrong, medicines wrong; it was madness to let him go on working. I could flay Drood alive."

Anne stared at her with faltering, dazed eyes. Horace about whom Trix had written so brightly and lightly, Horace whom she had hated for so long, was dying abroad, and Kate was here!

Kate sat down beside her, and their eyes were fixed on a bush of blackthorn, not on each other.

"Trix thinks that Roberts is only a valet, but he is a highly-trained nurse."

Still Anne did not speak.

"He did n't want me; he wished me to stay behind and look after things."

"Does he know?" asked Anne.

"No one has told him," said Kate.

"Horace is certain to know," said Anne.

"Yes."

"Oh, Kate!" Anne's hand lay on her sister's large white well-formed hands. It seemed as if her touch were pleasant to Kate, because she did not move. They sat a quarter of an hour in silence, and then Kate said she must go, and they rose. As they walked across the common she spoke again.

"Anne, I could not refuse him Trix. I could not tell Trix the truth. Don't be angry with me."

"Dear Kate."

"It is part of the illness that he does not want me. It may change at any time, and then I shall go at once. He may live for months; it is almost certain that he will not die quickly."

"Will Roberts send for you?"

"I have said nothing about it to Roberts; that would worry Horace; he sees through everything; he would find out. If he wishes it I shall stay away to the end."

Anne pressed her hands together until they hurt. Was this then to be the end of all that Kate had endured from Horace? All other human kind of all ages would have had some ritual, some bond of common action with which to meet their sorrow; these women had none. Cut off from tradition, disinherited from the beliefs of their race, brought up chiefly in negation, they did not envy the ideas of other races and other times. They were standing in a position unnatural to the human mind. They took the facts before them with open minds, and accepted their ignorance of any explanation as yet another fact not to be explained. They suffered at times more, at other times less, than those of any kind of faith. They had not the consolations of those who believe more, but the sorrows of those who know such consolations are more living, more acute. On the whole there is most vitality in what is most human. The soul that is most alive can suffer the most acutely, but the dull ache may be even more heavy, more exhausting.

One thing they could express: they had an intense horror of bodily pain.

"Roberts will give him any amount of morphia if he needs it," said Kate.



VII

ALL LIES

TRIX was absolutely under the spell of St. Jean des Pluies. She felt the charm of the open, friendly faces, of the odd general shops, where things that she had never seen before were proclaimed to be English, and where there were string-baskets and wooden sabots. She bought some *dragées de menthe*, and reflected that peppermint tasted much better under such a name.

"Why were they singing in the fields?" she asked the woman who was putting up the peppermints in a paper bag.

"Because it is the Rogations."

"What are the Rogations?"

"Mademoiselle is, then, a Protestant?"

Trix smiled. "No."

The woman looked puzzled; and then, as if politeness forbade further inquiries, she exclaimed: "It is to bless the fields that we may have a good harvest."

"And do you often have good harvests?"

"Ah, pour ça, non."

"But you still ask?"

"Mais oui, certainement; le bon Dieu nous donne ce qu'Il voudra, mais on demande toujours."

"But it does not seem to have much effect," thought Trix with a sarcastic little smile as she left the shop. The woman who kept the shop had been quite polite, but she was not curious or interested in strangers.

Trix wandered on through the village, and dawdled a moment in the cool church. It was soon after *déjeuner* and the sun was hot. In the church sat several old women, absorbed in some mental actions, with a look of repose on toil-worn, sunburnt faces. They wore caps composed of narrow, white strips of lace or embroidery that showed their smooth hair almost uncovered. One or two younger women were kneeling.

"An English Protestant, or American, no doubt," thought the sacristan, who was saying her beads close under the carved stone pulpit. Trix only gave her a moment's distraction.

Presently an old woman pushed open the heavy, creaking door, and Trix through the opening saw her father standing outside. She went out to him. He was standing in the shade, his tall figure bent and leaning sideways on his stick, a little way from the door. He looked at her fixedly; then as she came near him he smiled.

"You reminded me of my sister Mary," he said.

"Of Aunt Mary?"

"Yes, by the way, she was your aunt"; then, with a quick sigh, "that might account for it."

"She died very young," said Trix.

"It was the severity of the life," said Horace.

"What life?" asked Trix breathlessly.

"It is less life than a form of slow suicide," said Horace bitterly. "She was a nun."

"Oh," gasped Trix.

He did not seem surprised at her knowing so little about his sister.

"But as you came out of that church in your white

frock, with your golden hair and shining eyes, though hers were blue and yours are brown, you were startlingly like her. Let us get a sail; Roberts has found a fisherman who will take us."

"Oh, I hope it is 'le Petit-bon.' I talked to him yesterday and he is so fascinating."

It was Petit-bon who was waiting for them.

Petit-bon was a fisherman who had an inborn gift for taking possession of people. After a few days it would have seemed treason to the Blakes—*père et fille*—to have had any other man's boat. His large, brown, friendly eyes passed all over Horace as he leant back in the low, narrow seat.

"Monsieur est souffrant," he said kindly.

Horace did not look responsive. "In the good air of the sea Monsieur se remettra." He was then occupied with his boat and shouting orders to his boy. Presently he began to sing:

"Je suis un gâs de Saint Malo,
Et vous, fille de Cornouailles,
Avec le pauvre matelot
Vous désirez les accordailles.
M'aimer serait du temps perdu,
Chassez-moi de votre pensée . . .
L'amour, hélas! m'est défendu
Car la Mer est ma fiancée!

"Lorsque j'étais petit garçon,
Et que je dormais sur la grêve,
La Mer chantait à sa façon,
Afin de mieux bercer mon rêve.
Ne tenons plus de doux propos,
Comme nous faisions tout à l'heure.
Ma fiancée a le cœur gros:
Entendez-vous comme elle pleure?"

"It 's delicious," cried Trix.

"Mademoiselle ne connait pas les chansons de Théodore Botrel?" he asked with surprise.

"Qu'est-ce qu'on chantait ce matin au bord de la mer?"

"It was the '*Ave Maris Stella.*'"

"And what is that?"

"My dear child, don't expose your ignorance," laughed Horace. He repeated some verses of the hymn, while the boatman nodded his head in approval. Trix looked a little offended.

"Monsieur est catholique?" asked Petit-bon, who was more inquisitive than most of his neighbours.

"Monsieur ne croit à rien," he answered smiling; an announcement that Petit-bon could only pretend not to have noticed. He was inclined to think that Horace belonged to some secret society.

"Il y a beaucoup de franc-maçons par ici," he said in a non-committal voice.

"Parmi les femmes aussi?" asked Trix.

"Non, par exemple," exclaimed Petit-bon. "Il leur faut la religion aux femmes; qu'est-ce qu'elles feront quand leurs maris seront aux pêches? Comment élever leurs petits? comment soigner les malades? comment supporter la vie? Nous avons besoin tous de consolations de temps en temps, n'est-ce pas, Monsieur? mais pour les femmes toujours."

Trix shuddered at this summary of a woman's life, this awful grey picture of toil and suffering alleviated by superstition and lies.

"They would not be content to be slaves otherwise," she said in a low voice in English to her father.

"I have never yet seen a Frenchwoman who in the faintest degree resembled a slave," said Horace smiling.



"They look to me like harassed and imperious rulers. I know nothing so full of arrogant self-confidence and pitiless logic as a mère de famille."

Then Petit-bon began to sing again:

"En vrai Breton, j'ai pour la Mer,
Un amour sauvage et farouche,
J'ai soif de son baiser amer
Qui parfume et meurtrit ma bouche.
Rendez-moi vite mes genêts,
Reprenez votre boucle blonde,
Ma fiancée est aux aguets:
Entendez-vous comme elle gronde?

"Quand on lui fait quelque chagrin
La Mer se venge de l'infâme . . .
C'est pourquoi le pauvre marin
Ne devrait jamais prendre femme. . . .
Adieu! puisqu'il en est ainsi,
Vous ne serez pas mon épouse . . .
Mais ne rôdez plus par ici,
Car ma fiancée est jalouse."

Horace Blake looked over the water and delighted in the glorious sensation of cutting through the waves, he felt so well, so light in every limb. The holiday was doing him an immensity of good. There was no work, no worry, no question of what would be useful, no stimulus to exertion, only pleasure and returning health. It was one of those interludes in the progress of a disease when the still healthy elements of the body insist on being in the ascendant. It did not surprise Roberts in the least; he went to bed each night as a man might do who expected to be called into action before morning. He showed great tact, and seemed delighted at Blake's enjoyment of his food. Horace could eat well, walk quite a fair distance, and take

a good siesta in the middle of the day, but Roberts doubted if he got much sleep at night. This state of things lasted for nearly a week. Then one morning Trix went to her father's room and Roberts opened the door. Horace was lying with his face to the wall; an odour of drugs filled the room. Roberts only said in a low voice: "Better go out and come and see him later."

Trix went down the polished wooden stairs, hardly knowing that she had received a shock. She struggled against her tears with a little youthful optimism, but she was distinctly afraid. It seemed as if a shadow was creeping forward, a shadow that had really been with them in London, that had veiled her mother's eyes. It was creeping up now in spite of the sunshine. But she found Petit-bon on the beach and had a talk with him, and then she walked to the station and bought some papers and one or two books that looked amusing for her father. She was quite bright when she came in. Roberts was in the hall giving some orders.

"Will father be down for *déjeuner?*" she asked.

"He can't eat anything," said Roberts. "Will you stay with him? I must go out to the chemist in the town."

Horace did not notice Trix when she first went in. She sat very quiet by the open window. He was lying on his back with his eyes closed, and an angry look on his mouth.

"They never tell the truth," he muttered to himself, and then gave a little groan. "All lies," he said presently again.

Trix, sitting by the window, shivered with fear.

"Where 's the lemonade?" His hand went out

feebly towards the table by him. Trix went to the bed and gave him the glass of lemonade. "Lower," he said; he drank a mouthful and signed to her to take it away.

"Why did n't the fool bring the drugs he wanted from London?" He was not speaking to Trix, and she kept silence.

"Poor child!" he said suddenly, and then, to himself: "What does she know about anything?" Then he got more drowsy and was presently quite asleep, breathing noisily.

It was the longest hour Trix had ever known while the heavy breathing went on. The noises in the hotel were muffled, but every now and then some movement in the room above sounded loud and sharp on the wooden floor.

Trix's life had been so orderly, so healthy, so regular. Her aunt and she both had splendid health; she had never known sickness. Roberts at last came in with a bottle and a glass of water and signed to her to go down-stairs. The dining-room was empty. A maid with a kindly, stupid face brought her an omelette.

"Monsieur est bien malade," she said sympathetically.

"He came here to rest," said Trix, hungrily eating her omelette.

"To rest . . . pour se reposer?" Her eyebrows went up in astonishment.

"We have a good doctor here," she volunteered presently, as she brought a dish of little green peas swimming in butter. "He attended my mother; he knew exactly when she would die. When he says anybody will die, that person will surely die; he is a most excellent doctor."

Trix could have screamed, but the woman's kindly face was company to her. As soon as she had finished she went up-stairs to see if she could send Roberts to get some *déjeuner*. Her father smiled when she came in; the look in his face had changed, it showed a certain physical relief. Roberts was washing his face and hands.

"If Miss Blake read to you?"

"What would amuse me is hardly suitable to Miss Blake," said her father. "My dear Trix, did you mention at the bookstall that those two books you brought me were for your father's Sunday reading? They were hardly literature for the young miss."

"I did," said Trix, with a little flush of colour, "but I never thought——"

"That 's quite right—don't think," said Horace, and moved uneasily.

For an hour the drug which Roberts had given him appeared to succeed, and then Roberts began to look anxious. Horace groaned, and presently low, deep-voiced curses alternated with the groans. He and Roberts forgot the presence of Trix. Horace was nasty—uncommonly nasty, but Roberts did not think much of that. But to Trix those minutes were hideous. In her education, pain was the awful, incomprehensible evil; it was the enemy in life. She had never seen anyone in physical suffering before.

Horace, looking up in the midst of a fresh blasphemy, saw her brown eyes bright with horror and terror.

"Send her away!" he cried angrily.

Trix went blindly to her room, found her hat, and almost rushed out of the house, and did not pause till she reached the sea. It was high, the sky was grey.

She sat down on a rock still uncovered, and mechanically fixed her eyes on the threatening water.

"Why could not they manage better; why did not Roberts give him the right drug at once? How awful! how hideous!"

There had been no dignity in it, nothing but the lower side of human life. It had been so animal. She did not know that that was what had been such a shock to her youth. She wanted to feel nothing but the tenderest pity, and she had had to struggle with disgust. That extraordinarily speaking face of Horace Blake's, luminous, not only in the strong, light eyes but in the whole countenance—had been terrible to see. Provocative, suggestive, magnetic—magnetic, suggestive, provocative. The interviewers had rung the changes on those overworked adjectives again and again. Even to Roberts that face when in pain was astonishing, and to Trix it had just made the world reel.

Presently she cried—cried heartily and freely, and then she began to watch the waves flowing in craftily, murmuring in their incessant talk to the unresponsive earth. There is no sound in Nature that can soothe human ears as that can. She began to wonder which little wave had in it the force to reach her feet, and which had not. It was hard to measure the power of their force; one which looked strong and firm broke into frivolous spray, and another, light, gentle, and curling, was suddenly all round her and washed right into a still green pool behind the rock on which she sat. She felt faintly pleased that her feet and her skirt were wet. Then she sighed and went back to the hotel to find out how her father was.

Roberts met her in the road outside the hotel.

"Mr. Blake is asleep," he said cheerfully.

Trix was enormously relieved, but she felt angry with Roberts.

"Why could you not give him more morphia?" she asked with a child's imperiousness.

"I have given more morphia than the doctors would allow as it is. Sir Thomas told me to try a new American drug if I could get it fresh. That is what I gave him to-day," he said sorrowfully. He was thinking, as he had often thought before, that Mrs. Blake was a very strange woman to have allowed this child to be here alone.

Roberts did not look as if he wished to say more. Trix shrank from asking him what she longed to know. But she too thought as she turned away from the hotel that her mother ought to come to her father.

Trix moved towards the village a little lower down the road, and presently came into the little open square where stood a great crucifix, immense against the sky. She found the narrow street that led from the *Place* to the church half-filled by a group of women, and she saw that two were weeping. They had fair, smooth faces, and fair hair drawn tightly back under the white caps from their wide foreheads. The tears seemed to fall lightly over the strong, calm faces. Trix turned with a look of inquiry to the woman from the little shop who did not wait for her question.

Yes, there had been a great misfortune. A dear little child—*un tout petit*—not more than seven years old, had climbed down the face of the rocks. They would do it, all boys would. But this one had been so small, and he had wanted some bright shining stone to decorate the altar beneath the Calvary, and he had slipped and been killed. And his poor mother! The



whole village expressed but one thought, one deep sigh for that mother, and the deepest feeling in the French character made them as one family in their mourning. They told each other, and they told Trix, what a lovely boy he had been, how his curls were gold and his eyes Our-Lady's blue. He had been the little John the Baptist in last year's procession at the *Fête Dieu*. Then someone said that the *vicaire* had been with the mother ever since he said his Mass. "But he is at vespers now?" "No, they must manage for once to sing vespers without him." "Ah! he is the one," they said, "when there is trouble."

Trix at last passed on, and then, feeling as if she must see more of this little set of people in their trouble, she went into the church. It was full, but she found an empty chair by the door. It was annoying that her chair made a loud, scraping noise on the flags, for the church was very still and it seemed to make her conspicuous. The *curé* looked very tall in the pulpit —a big, strong figure, out of whose mouth came a voice soft and very gentle, the voice of one in bad health. Trix's heart was heavy and her nerves terribly unstrung. She felt at once an extraordinary sense of peace and rest in this company of strong, simple folk. It seemed as if they absolutely overflowed with something that lapped her about. She shut her eyes and took her rest. She was not asleep, only resting, and presently she caught some words of the preacher. He was leaning forward with a curious simplicity and dignity of mien, not the conventional pulpit attitude, but that of one trained and drilled by a deep reverence and love for the souls he spoke to, and the sweet, weak voice said: "Eh bien, qui de nous, mes frêres, n'a pas besoin de consolation?"

Trix covered her face with her hands. Was there indeed no one who was not in want of consolation? Was the whole world in pain? She could have said yesterday that she did not want consolation; she could not say it to-day. And what was consolation? She had been taught to think that sympathy and consolation were of little worth; what mattered was to prevent evil, not to cry about it together afterwards. But whether rightly or wrongly she wanted consolation, and she wanted to weep with this village that wept. She supposed that this sweet sense of sharing their sorrow was in some way consolation; anyhow she liked it.

She was too full of her own thoughts to follow the *curé's* sermon much; besides, utterly simple as it was, it would have puzzled her. Trix had never read the gospels. She caught words from time to time that she thought she misunderstood: "Blessed are they that mourn," for instance. Presently a door to the south of the church opened and the *vicaire* came in. His bright, red cheeks were shining with tears. He knelt down on a chair close to the door; they all knew whence he had come. As soon as the sermon was ended he looked round at the choir, and then led off a Latin hymn in a loud, ringing voice, which was taken up on all sides:

"Regina coeli, laetare! Alleluia.
Quia quem meruisti portare, Alleluia.
Resurrexit sicut dixit, Alleluia.
Ora pro nobis Deum, Alleluia."

It was a strange old chant, something like a Christmas carol in its light, bright reiteration of the Alleluia. But it had, at that moment, the brightness of tears.



Trix liked it, she did not know why. The Breton folk loved it, because they had always sung it, and because now it seemed as if in the heights of Heaven they could hear the little piping voice of a child they had had among them yesterday, still singing Alleluia in their company, only his little voice had already the sweetness and strength of eternity. For "his young innocence had been crowned with an eternal weight of glory."

VIII

OUR NEW BISHOP IS APPOINTED

THE presbytery was large; the dining-room was long and narrow and very plainly furnished. It had a touch of austerity, and implied an absence of the sense of the beautiful, though there was nothing to offend the taste except some smooth prints—libels on Popes and ecclesiastics—that hung on the walls. But deep below the house was a pleached alley covering a wide terrace, and between the branches of the rough and wind-swept hornbeams shone the blue sea with a thousand brown islands. For the tide was low, and pure white sand made a base to the greater rocks, which were usually half-hidden by the water while those low-lying dangers, the smaller islets, were usually altogether invisible.

Four priests were sitting in the close shade of the hornbeams drinking their thin black coffee out of thick glasses. The *vicaire* finished his and put it down on the wooden table, with a bang, beside his empty liqueur glass. He was in high spirits; the glory of the weather excited him. He was a son of the countryside, and after *déjeuner* he was to pay his weekly visit to his mother. He went to the edge of the terrace, observed that it was perfect weather to get in the lucern, burst into a snatch of song, abruptly stopped and sat down again with a half-laugh at his own thoughts. The *vicaire* was always restless, generally in a hurry. His black hair often shone

through the drops of perspiration, and his black, slightly prominent eyes shone with a liquid light also. It was on the whole best for his companions when he was in good spirits. He was so vehemently black when he was black at all, which was pretty often. But, when in high spirits, he was only really aggravating to the *sous-vicaire*. The *sous-vicaire*, whose cultivated sermons won the respect of the sacristan, was no Breton, no poet; he was not intoxicated by sunshine or even depressed by a sea-fog. He was more correct, more ecclesiastically conventional than the *vicaire*, and it was unbearable to him that, after drinking cider or black coffee, his *confrère* would bang down his glass either as an expression of hilarity or to punctuate a mood of gloom.

M. le Curé, leaning back on his stiff chair, with feet extended and crossed, and hands held out touching each other at their finger-tips, gave forth a milder radiance of cheerfulness. The great tall figure seemed singularly at rest, and the heavy eyelids were almost half-closed. The cheeks were flushed red, of a lighter red than the *vicaire's* cheeks, and he looked the picture of health, but it was whispered that he suffered much. Some shadow of disease hung about him, and the all-pervading gentleness was nurtured by the experience of acute pain. He loved the *vicaire;* he knew him far better than he knew his pocket, which was a little difficult to get at as his figure grew larger. He knew in his younger *confrère* the storms and the gusts of wind, the energy and intense affections, the vanity and the humility, the joy in life and the poet's gloom, all native to the coast to which they both belonged. He had him well in hand, that *vicaire* of his, and kept him to the level below which he might otherwise

have sunk, for the younger man's sympathies were not only enlisted by the loss of a husband at sea, or the fall of an only child down into some merciless cleft in the harsh rocks; he joyed in a prize won in a lottery, and might have become too merry for perfect dignity at a wedding-feast. The *curé* knew so well the moment at which it would be safest to send the *vicaire* to travel, whether only to Mont St. Michel or far away, as far as Lourdes. But even the *curé* never discovered the passionate ideal of the *vicaire's* life—a voyage to America. It was to him the expression of all freedom and adventure, all the poetry of expansion and a crown to ambition. "He has been in America, that one," the people of this Breton country would always say to one another after that. Perhaps the *vicaire* would gaze at the sea, immersed in his day-dream, and then give an angry laugh, after which withal he would shoulder his cross again and look in on an old woman whose disease was conveyed by another sense than that of sight, and who had a singularly repellent effect on him. All his loyalty and affection responded to the restraining gentleness of his superior, and he worked enough for two men to save the *curé* in strength and peace of mind.

On a fine afternoon such as this, and a Thursday, when, as everyone knew in the village, he would go a very long walk to visit his mother, he saw all his companions in sunshine, and was ready to let the *sous-vicaire* be as cold and dry as he liked without minding him. Shadowy and quiet sat the old priest-pensioner, the *bête noire* of the sacristan, *le tout petit*, as the others spoke of politics. The *curé* and the *vicaire* being Bretons were warmly devoted to monarchy, though they alluded to their sentiments in a humorous man-

ner and understood each other in half-words and implications. The *sous-vicaire* hated the Republic far more than he loved any other form of government.

And as they talked, *le tout petit* was more and more the little odd man out. For *le tout petit* had been *rallié* to the Republic, not *rallié* under order from Rome, but *rallié* from conviction and with enthusiasm. He had not lived among peasants with hearts that held the faith of centuries undisturbed; his lot had been thrown where men and women did not believe, did not pray, where they associated religion with the upper classes. Here religion was a bond of equality; there it had seemed to support a terrible inequality. *Le tout petit* had striven to get into touch with a hard, incredulous, money-getting class of peasant proprietors, and it had seemed to him that if they could know priests who were entirely dissociated from conservative politics and aristocratic friends, they might turn to them once more. And he had not succeeded; his life had fallen between two stools, with only one brief time of sunshine when a sanguine cardinal had persuaded the then Pope to advise, where advice was a command, all the clergy to become *ralliés* to the Republic, to break with the romance of the majority of their hearts, to renounce monarchical traditions, and to kneel to kiss the hand that was quivering with eagerness for their destruction. Then *le tout petit* had been happy in the thought that his *confrères* would surely come to see that Pope Leo was right, and as true patriots they would be understood and loved by their countrymen. He was not young then, his vitality had never been very strong, and that was his St. Martin's summer.

They often quite forgot him, the other three, as

they descanted on the painful history of recent years, and the latest news from Paris. It was easy to forget *le tout petit*, and even the *curé* had never penetrated into the terrible disillusion that had followed the breakdown of his hopes that an *esprit nouveau* would Christianise the Republic.

He was listlessly watching the brown sails of some fishing-boats going swiftly to the west and turning to a magnificent red in the sun, and purposely not listening to the talk of the other three, when his attention was caught by a bit of news that M. le Curé was imparting.

"Our new bishop is appointed," he said. "Monseigneur Ledoulx."

Le tout petit turned round eagerly.

"Monseigneur Ledoulx!" he cried joyfully.

"Ah! you know him, then?"

"He was a true and good friend to me."

"They say," said the *curé*, "that he is zealous, indefatigable, and one that makes himself listened to by the Government."

"He has been suspected of Modernism," said the *sous-vicaire*, who had a mania for suspecting heterodoxy, and who also had just felt the swift and half-conscious annoyance that he had often experienced before on hearing of ecclesiastical promotion.

"It is fortunate," said the *curé* dryly, "that to be suspected of Modernism is not the same thing as being tainted by it."

"Any man of character or originality must pass through that way," said the *vicaire* rather roughly. "There are always to be found people with noses so sharp that they can create smells where they don't exist."

The *sous-vicaire* drew himself up stiffly. The *vicaire* heard the clock strike three before the others noticed it; it was the signal for his start to walk to his home, and not even the news of the bishop's appointment could keep him back a moment longer.

After he had gone the *curé* became first silent, then restless. At last he said in his gentle, courteous way:

"A delightful day for a walk," and then asked the *sous-vicaire* to take a message from him to the notary who lived some way from the village.

To his surprise *le tout petit* found that the *sous-vicaire* was asking him to walk out with him. He readily agreed.

They had left the village behind them when the *sous-vicaire* after a moment's break in their hitherto uninteresting chit-chat, said with meaning:

"M. le Curé wanted to be alone."

The simple old man looked inquiringly first at the neat conventional figure, and then at the conventional, well-shaved face of his companion.

"He was expecting M. Jules from A——"—naming a town at some distance. "There will be a consultation to-day, and he did not intend us to know it."

"But then"—and the faint, vague eyes of the old priest were turned towards him again. "How did you know it?"

"I heard M. le Curé tell Marthe that Messieurs les médecins were to be shown up-stairs, and as we left the village did you not see M. Jules in his carriage?"

"I earnestly hope it is not serious."

"And if it is not serious would our doctor ask to have M. Jules in consultation?"

Then they paid their visit to the notary and walked back in the rich afternoon sunlight.

"Undoubtedly," said the *sous-vicaire*, "M. le Curé will retire after this."

"Oh, I trust not!" cried the other.

"And then, I ask you, who is to be the *curé* in St. Jean des Pluies?"

"But the *vicaire*, surely? The people adore him."

"Out of the question; besides, his roughness and his want of manners, where would he be, what would he not do, if M. le Curé did not restrain him? Besides, there are other reasons of which you must know, which are known to authority; but, *tiens!* here is the sacristan. We must greet her. It is long, madame, since you have walked so far."

Le tout petit was so much annoyed by this conversation that he hardly realised the sacristan's presence.

"What did you mean?" he asked anxiously, as soon as the sacristan, still bowing with official dignity, had left the *sous-vicaire* to replace his hat and rejoin his companion.

"Nothing," he said; "if you know nothing, be content. I am not the person to revive gossip anyway. Tell me now of your friend, our new Bishop—Mgr. Ledoulx." And he made himself thoroughly agreeable to the old man, who was accustomed to dull walks by himself.

All the same, *le tout petit* understood the nature of his companion much better than his companion understood him after that walk.

There were no after symptoms of the doctors' visit at the presbytery, and it was impossible to detect any change in the serene bearing of M. le Curé.



IX

FINIS

TRIX did not see her father again until the evening of the next day. He was much annoyed at the thought of how he must have appeared to the child, who knew nothing of life or of pain. He did not want to see her until he could efface the painful impression. When Trix was at last summoned by Roberts to his room, it was all in order, and flowers, big irises and big pink roses, stood in a green jug on the table by him. He was sitting up in an armchair in a smart dressing-gown. The face was haggard, but the great luminous eyes were smiling. Trix, he could see, was a little tremulous, but the most morbid fancy could not detect in her any kind of shrinking.

Horace began at once to talk to her about a letter from her mother, giving an amusing account of things said to her or overheard by her at the theatre where his play was acted. He did not give her the letter, there were things in it quite unsuitable to her. Trix was keen, excited and amused, her father's success was a romance to her. Then her quick, gentle sympathy responded to anything that would distract and help him. Trix had more of the actual quality of kindness in her than is quite common in girls—much love may miss that quality of kindness; it is more often the fruit of experience than an inborn instinct, but when it is inborn it is the nobler side of tact. It could not have been taught to Trix in any school of education,

and she might well have missed it in her lonely aunt's school of brave, cheerful stoicism. She wanted to be charmed by her father—kind souls want to be charmed—and he wanted to charm her, and put out all his powers to do so. Roberts, moving about in the next room, was surprised at hearing the patient make himself so agreeable, for Horace Blake did not charm him in the least. There was something strange, too, in those paternal and filial relations, something that showed want of intimacy. The man-nurse had felt from the first that Horace and his daughter were not intimate. They had got on "like a house on fire" on the journey, but it was exactly like the making acquaintance of two sympathetic people.

"A queer card!" thought Roberts, "makes his wife stay at home and brings out this child, who 'll get some pretty bad shocks before we 've done."

At last he felt that he must settle his patient for the night and send Miss Trix off to bed. Horace grumbled, but submitted; his eyes dwelt insistently on Trix as she stood by him, reluctant to go and reluctant to disobey Roberts. When she had gone the light faded from his face.

"Well," he muttered, "the evening has flown, and the child is happy in idealising me again. I wonder what poor Kate would think of us? Poor Kate! I should never have succeeded without Kate. Her complexion was never as good as Trix's, but her feet and her hands are as fine as they are made."

His mind turned to the work he wanted to finish and send back to his wife, and it was long after he was settled in bed before he could sleep.

Next morning Roberts told Trix that her father was better, and was at work, so she knew that she must

not go to his room. The three next days were the last in which Horace Blake produced any creative work.

It was only the third act of the play that was left to be written. In the two first acts Blake had, as has already been said, abandoned the attempt to satisfy the censor. He had told his wife that *The Burning Bush* should be published as a book, and that he would trust to the public to force it on the stage. It was partly no doubt that as his health failed the difficulty of presenting his creations with sufficient diplomacy was too exhausting; but, also, that success had made him sure of his public. Whether even during the writing of the first act there had been a certain premonition or subconscious knowledge that his time was short, which had made him inclined to have one last free fling, one last unmasked jeer at the world as he had seen it, it is impossible to say. No doubt he lost in artistic effect, in reserve, in suggestion, and perhaps in stage presentation by disregard of the fetters that had hitherto kept his work in perspective, but probably he gained in vigour. When he read over the first two acts in the different surroundings on the Breton coast, he recognised that there would be fresh force, a more electric touch, in the work he was just about to do. Probably the increased morphia supplied a hectic flush in the atmosphere of that last act.

This last production was no swan-song, no pathetic melody; it was not exactly shrill, so that it could not be called a scream; perhaps it was more like the last peal of thunder in that life of storm. There was in it the note, "All we who are about to die revolt against you." Hitherto it had been easy for the public to

say that it did not know what he was at, that, after all, it was only the conventionalities and pruderies that he was attacking. But now he took off the mask and strutted before them. It suited the dramatic instinct, this blare from a dying man. He would go down with a splash, with a great noise, not a foolish empty sound; it was the curse of genius that should resound long after he had fallen into silence. This would assure his renown, this would satisfy Kate's passion for fame. He at the very end would put forth

. . . . . un cantico
Che forse non morrà.

The artistic faculties seeming to be entirely in possession silenced the fear of death and screened and framed the picture he was to paint, so that he was conscious of nothing else. There was no element in his nature, good, bad, or indifferent, that did not appear to be given up as fuel to feed the imagination.

There was the body to reckon with. But the body can so often be thoroughly bullied and made a slave for a time, sure of its revenge.

Roberts was cowed into submission; he had never been cowed by a patient before. Blake wrote sometimes in bed, sometimes in a chair, sometimes kneeling, only half-conscious of the physical misery that produced this perpetual restlessness. Roberts gave him the blackest coffee, or brandy, or tea, without remonstrance; took away plates of untasted food without remonstrance, and did not even dare to suggest that he should go out of doors. Horace neither washed nor dressed during those three days, but when the last scene was written, and for the last time and with a flourish of the pen he had put "Finis" on

the last page, he said to himself: "Bath, bed and morphia."

He fainted coming out of the bath and again in bed, but there was a certain satisfaction in his face, the satisfaction of work done: at that moment he missed Kate. He missed her acutely, for she would have understood. While Roberts was at supper, Horace got the morphia for himself, and next morning Roberts gave warning; he would return to England as soon as Mr. Blake could find a substitute.

The church bells were ringing, for it was the eve of the *Fête Dieu*, as the MS. of the last act of Horace Blake's last play was put into the post-box.

X

WHY ON EARTH DID I DO THAT?

FROM the earliest moment of the dawn of morning the village had been astir; carts of pure white sand had been brought in the night before, and it was now spread in a narrow foot-path wherever the procession was to pass. There was a pleasant sense of bustle, and traditional bustle, for it had ever been thus on the morning of the *Fête Dieu*. Christianity was in possession on that morning at least, and if in the big wine-shop off the *Place*, or at the post-office, some Freemasons were muttering wicked things, they had to mutter them very low indeed. One young man was looking angry; he had put up the shutters of his master's shop, intending to get himself off for the day to join some congenial spirits in a neighbouring town. Two girls, who were decorating the next house by hanging clean sheets from the windows, asked him a little tauntingly what he was doing in the way of decoration. He became furious, and while struggling with the shutters, kept calling out: "Qu'on ne s'occupe pas de moi, qu'on ne s'occupe pas de moi, c'est tout ce que je demande, moi." He said it over and over again. As if anybody in France ever were left to himself for good or evil!

A little soldier in uniform, kneeling in the road, looked up at the girls with a roguish smile. He was very busy making a picture of a ship with rose leaves and the heads of white pinks in the sand. The white

sand pathway, on which no one would step except the priest who carried the Blessed Sacrament, was edged with wide green flags that looked like spikes of palm, and at little intervals knelt women and children making their different designs—crosses or the "I. H. S."—in flowers in the sand. But no one had made such an elaborate or successful design as the little soldier.

Farther on, close to the church, there was even more being done. Two young women with bright faces were busily hanging pink paper roses round the attenuated pillar of a twelfth century cross in the happiest unconsciousness of the barbarism they were committing. A girl, who was arranging a bunch of great purple irises at its foot, cried out shrilly to some "madame" to know if that would do well, but no one was at leisure to answer her. At length all was finished, and little boys in red cassocks wreathed with real red roses, like Roman emperors crowned for a debauch, gathered in the *Place* and walked together to the sacristy. Everybody was arriving now, and the proud parents of the "little Christ"—who was dressed in white, crowned with thorns and carrying his cross—had to demand room that was eagerly accorded for his passage into the church. Then followed, clothed in sheepskins, a child of a year older, bearing the symbolic cross of reeds that is traditionally given to St. John the Baptist.

The organ burst forth noisily and drowned all the squeaking of the crowded chairs on the stone pavement. The sacristan, feeling at the height of the circumstances, was more than usually imperious in manner. The innumerable candles were lit. M. le Curé was ready vested. In another moment Mass would begin.

Horace, unconscious of the excitement that had reached even to the secular-minded servants of the hotel, came out of his room for the first time since the writing fit had come upon him. The light had flared and died out. The two days and nights in which Horace had given what the journalists would soon call his last message to the world had left him a sorry sight. The hotel servants looked at each other significantly as he made his slow way down the shallow wooden stairs. He looked as if he breathed with difficulty; his sallow face seemed to have become a little crooked; the long nose and the mobile mouth had lost their unity of design. The great grey eyes that held the light so curiously distributed in their depths were startling in their mixed intensity and dimness. The whole person was awry and out of drawing, shattered and exhausted. Now that the work was done, the last production had been given out of the brain stuff which was needed to keep him alive. He looked like a man who stumbles in the morning after a drunken debauch. He had not been able to endure the skilled touch of Roberts' fingers; he had dragged on his own clothes and mistaken a shirt stained with a brown drug for the clean one he had meant to put on. He stumbled twice in the little front garden of the hotel, but even a kindly American dared not offer to help him.

As he turned towards the sea he took off his hat and then loosened his collar, and the warm, keen air swept on to his chest. He wanted to think of what he had sent to his wife; he regretted now that he had not altered a phrase that displeased him. He still wished he could read it to Kate and then hear her read it to him, but he only wished for her to be there just for

that, not for anything else—he did not want her there to see things in her face and hear things in her voice. It was only as the fellow-pirate in their intellectual battle, the one who could best assure him that he had conquered, that he would like to have her. For the meeting face to face with the terror that stood a few feet away, that could not be shrouded long in the thinnest of veils, he had no use for her. The artistic absorption had come to an end, it had left him without defence, without distraction, without control over his thoughts, over morbid imaginations and recollections.

He stumbled on, and—why, he did not know—certain cruel things he had done in his life came with a curious clearness to his mind, cruel things that had followed sensuality as if they were not separate or responsible actions. Did even Kate know half of what she must know soon? And the child before whom he had come to act a part—could she always be deceived? He was aware that Roberts despised him, knew him to be rotten morally as well as physically. He tried to think of the reviews, the applause, the splendid fact of fame, the sense of conquest, and it all came faintly. He was so sick, so tired, so nauseated, and he was growing so terribly afraid. Then there was music somewhere, a solemn chant; he felt faintly annoyed with it. It grew louder; he turned into a narrow street that led on to the *Place* and round a corner from a lane behind him it burst strongly upon him:

> "Pange lingua gloriosi
> Corporis mysterium."

He feared he could not get away now; he crept back into an angle of the wall and the people passed, singing

with a peculiar mixture of enthusiasm and matter-of-fact—the same hymn they had always sung on the same day—they and their fathers, and their fathers' fathers before them. He was wedged in by the crowd, and the noise and pressure tried him, he was as unnoticed as the most miserable beggar. He had an odd fancy that they were so much alive these people, so rich while he was starved and dying—and no one gave him a crumb of their comfort. Was it not a sham, this singing, these children crowned with flowers, this Presence that was coming? He had said so all his manhood, had given it the subtle insults of genius. He suddenly told himself that he could not have aimed his shafts half so well if he had not known what it was to adore what he insulted. He longed to get away out of it all, down to the solitude and peace of the beach, but it was now evident that he could not escape. The sense of being penned in by the small crowd became a terrible oppression. Would they press still closer as they passed? Would he be able to breathe if they did? And then, partly out of the physical fear of the crowd, instead of thinking how he hated all the superstition and hypocrisy and priestcraft visible to his eyes, by a sudden freak of his imagination he began to realise the mind of the crowd. He saw that they were full of exaltation, of emotion—even the more reserved had their share in it, and it was an intensely human emotion. There was—or so they themselves believed—a vast margin to this multitude, not only their own dead belonged to it, but the dead and the living of all races and tribes under the sun—a crowd which no man could number. He seemed physically oppressed by the small visible crowd and mentally oppressed by the vast invisible crowd. The intellect-

uals to whom he appealed for sympathy and applause were so few; the people who could sing hymns to the spiritual powers that rule their destinies were so many. As they jostled against him, singing with a terrible vigour, he had a sort of imaginative vision of how they would all look on him. He fancied he saw with absolute clearness what that crowd would think of him could they know his life. His dramatic power was taking advantage of his physical condition to add to his wretchedness.

The voices rose high, but they seemed to Horace to come out of the earth at his feet, and from the depths of that earth there seemed to rise a power that responded to these children of men. He tried to control the horrible fancy of an atmosphere of indignation and condemnation. "It is an old, old trade, the trade of a blasphemer," he could fancy that a dark man in the crowd was speaking to him, "and man as well as God has executed judgment on him."

The crowd was thinner, he could breathe better. He began to hope he could move on now with the procession and get away round the market corner. But he had to wait. Soon no one passed but the choir boys and the priests immediately in front of the canopy. He disliked these priests' faces. His nervous fear was less. The canopy was coming now and there were space and flowers and boys swinging censers, and a hush. It was like a cool wind rising on a hot day. He was exhausted, he felt as if he had escaped the cruelty of the crowd, that he had been rescued. Then he looked under the canopy, the crowd was cruel, but this Presence was kind. All his childhood was with him for the moment. He had been so proud of throwing flowers before another canopy, and as he grew older

he had been proud of swinging a censer. He forgot everything present that did not belong to the past. The priest on one side of the canopy brushed against him in his narrow corner. He stumbled, and then, instead of recovering himself, he knelt down. A few moments later he walked away with difficulty. Presently he stopped and dusted his knees with his handkerchief.

"Why on earth did I do that?" he asked himself.



XI

I PREFER MORPHIA

M. LE CURÉ had spent a pleasant quarter of an hour with a visitor to St. Jean des Pluies the day after the *Fête Dieu*. The visitor was *bien pensant*, *croyant*, and a comfort to any *curé* for a quarter of an hour's chat. The two men, one tall, weather-beaten in appearance, the other short, stout, smooth, commercial, were finishing off with a number of elaborate bows; it was amazing that they both found room in the small porch for the waving of their hats and the sweeping of their arms.

This effect of bowing and sweeping gestures was not lost on Horace Blake, who was standing at the foot of the steps that led up to the presbytery from the front garden. His courteous smile took on a twinkle of amusement as he watched the parting. The stout *croyant* moved down one flight of steps as Horace slowly mounted the other. The *curé* stood with the door open, waiting politely for this next visitor. That the newcomer was in an advanced stage of disease must have been evident at once to a less experienced eye than that of the host of the presbytery.

"Could M. le Curé give me a few minutes' interview?" asked Horace.

M. le Curé would be happy to do so. He led the way into the long, bare dining-room. The visitor looked blankly at the table covered in oil-cloth, at

the stiff chairs arranged against the walls, and the portraits above them.

"I can't talk here," thought Horace, and a sullen look clouded the light that had lit his strange great eyes a moment before.

"Ah! but what a view!" he cried aloud in English, and with one feeble movement more he sank on to a horsehair-covered chair near an open window.

The *curé* smiled.

"'Earth, sea and sky hath nought to show more fair,'" he quoted, proud but stumbling.

"Ah, you know our literature," cried Blake in his most flattering manner, inwardly chafing.

"No, indeed; a little learnt at school," the priest went on in French. "I cannot talk English easily, nor quite always understand it."

Meanwhile the old man reflected that he had never seen any face change in so extraordinary a way from moment to moment. It seemed to be winning, contemptuous, humble, impertinent, angry, grateful, in bewildering succession. He did not sum it up distinctly, but it left on him a painful impression of a body wearing out, and a mind feverishly alive; it was as if some doubtful spirit were very slightly held by the flesh and yet tortured by it. The glory of sea and sky made for peace. Horace looked calmer for a moment, but presently the priest could see that the stranger was afraid, an unpleasant cowardice was in his drooping mouth.

"No one speaks the truth," he almost snarled, "but it must be plain enough to one who has seen many men die."

"Ah, many indeed," said the soft gentle voice of the big Breton, "and for the most part in peace."

"Whether they have led good lives or evil?"

The *curé* hesitated. "Yes," he said after a moment, "yes."

"It is something to know that," said Horace with a smile of irony. "But what do you suppose happens next?"

"Purgatory." He looked beyond Horace out on to the blue sea and the brown islands glorified in the sunset.

"I believe in nothing."

"And yet Monsieur knelt when the procession passed."

"One must do the civil thing," said Horace in English.

The old man flushed. Was this simply an impudent atheist who had followed him into his own house to insult God?

"To tell the truth, I could not conceive why I had done it," said Horace quickly, "and then, as I stumbled walking away I thought someone said, 'Why persecutest thou Me?' I believe—indeed, I am quite sure—that that impression was an echo of my childhood, something subconscious, something from inside me"—he was eager to analyse, to explain—"speaking to another part of me. What makes me think so is that several times that day I saw Christ in my mind, as I had seen Him in a picture in my childhood in Doré's illustrations of the Wandering Jew. In the picture the Jew has just insulted Christ as He carried His cross, and under it was written:

"'Jésus, la bonté même, me dit en soupirant,

"'Tu marcheras toi-même, pendant plus de mille ans.'

"Then, in the midst of this imagery, I had a clear

notion of love inflicting punishment—a thing I have mocked at often and often. I have girded at Dante, and the words he wrote on the gates of hell." He paused a moment and added with the faintest shrug of the bony shoulders: "That was my spiritual experience on the *Fête Dieu*, M. le Curé."

The doubtful expression, the dubious courtesy were again visible on the strange, suffering face.

"It is often thus," said the older man, "in a moment of exaltation we realise some picture, some incident, of our childhood."

Horace recognised the delicacy with which his companion chose that point for remark. There was a marked absence of intrusion in the singular gentleness of the *curé* which suited him.

"Yes," he responded, "it was a moment of excitement; I recognise that. I had just concluded a last work of a blasphemous character. What do you say to a blasphemer, M. le Curé?"

"That there are, alas, many such in this country."

Horace was struck into silence. "Many such!" He had seemed almost unique in his own country, in his own set. Those about him had not, had never experienced, enough faith to blaspheme.

"Then it is a passion you recognise?"

"Yes, Monsieur, the Gospel recognised it."

"And when that passion of blasphemy is exploited, is turned to worldly advantage, is the capital on which you live?"

"That, if I understand what Monsieur is saying, is also not uncommon in this country."

Again Horace was silenced. "I see," he thought to himself, "that to you it is a type." His eyes laughed. "It is the same category that holds the Jews, the

Freemasons, the journalists who scream against God and His Church. I am labelled, and all my vices would only fit the type in this old man's view; how simple, how strangely simple!"

He felt angry at such simplicity.

"And what would you say to the blasphemer?"

"Qu'il se mette à genoux, Monsieur."

"As long as his knees will bend," said Blake bitterly.

"Ah, oui, mon Dieu!"

There was a depth of sympathy in that exclamation that brought a kind of satisfaction to Horace. No one had pitied him openly as yet, and it was soothing, but all the same he shied at it.

"Then nothing will surprise you?" said Horace irritably. "It is all prepared for in your text-books. The atheist is a man of bad life."

"Text-books," said the old man, "if properly learned can be discarded by experience. I have known virtuous unbelievers; in your country, I believe, there are many non-Christian good men."

"I am not one of them," said Blake roughly. "But I have bored you for long enough; you have endured me with angelic kindness." There was a faint sarcasm in his voice; then, with a rapid change to a tone of philosophic analysis, he went on:

"There is something in your coast, in your church, in your people, M. le Curé, that stirs inherited instincts in me. The voices I heard by the sea on the morning of the Rogations, the faces of the women, the very pavement of the church, seem to be impregnated with a view, a scheme of life that embraces all that men need to know. Centuries of human life and suffering seem here to press on the imagination, deep answering to deep; the souls of those living are big with the souls

of the past. Your Armorica is strangely near the depths of the universe."

"I have never lived anywhere else."

"Well, many souls have lived here and are gone; others are living and going, M. le Curé, and they have many consolations I cannot have, but on the whole I prefer morphia."

"Why not have both, Monsieur?"

Blake rose. He shook his head. "Now for the bows," he thought; but there was no gay waving of the hat this time; the *curé* was gentle, courteous and reserved.

Blake decided as he wandered slowly and feebly down the road to the hotel that he liked him. But he was annoyed with himself, he felt that his manners had decidedly failed. He had betrayed his miseries, both physical and mental, more than he intended, and then his attitude had been a little impertinent; there had been in it something of a rather cheap cynicism.

"I might have left him alone," he thought. "I might have known that I would get nothing out of him of the least use to me."

XII

IF HE DIES NOW, WHAT AN ENIGMA

KATE had felt the hotel without Horace to be impossible. She hated their rooms for the anguish of the past days with the peculiar hatred of a woman who was more impressed by material surroundings than she owned to herself. She decided to stay for the present at her club, which was almost opposite the hotel.

Nothing could have suited her better. She found everything she wanted without feeling that anything had to be settled beyond provision for the next day's needs. At first she only unpacked one box and left the other fastened as a sign that she was ready to take the train to Southampton at an hour's notice.

Presently arrived the first of a series of cheerful letters. Horace's letters were garrulous and a little triumphant. Roberts wrote with satisfaction, but she recognised his professional caution. And Trix wrote about the Bretons and the sea and the fun, and how much father was enjoying himself. Kate was always at work in the silent reading-room when these letters arrived, and as they multiplied into a thick packet she began to feel the great fear lessen; the fear that had lately made her so anxious to see Horace's face clearly when she shut her eyes, as clearly as when he had been with her. Sir Thomas Goodstone had not in the least expected anything immediate; it had only been her own strong imaginary fear that the face would fade

and that she would never again have that faded likeness shamed by the reality. There were things in the letters that hurt. She was ashamed that she minded Horace's absorption in Trix and what they did together. She put the thought away, but it would not go, or when it had gone it came back so easily.

Altogether it was a great thing to be constantly busy. There were proofs in masses to correct for the new, complete edition of Blake's already published works. She loved the job. She liked seeing his work as a whole, recognising how it had developed, going over those early things that had been so little understood at the time. She liked to see how hard he had worked, how strenuous and thorough the work was, always his best; always he had had that infinite capacity for taking pains. She had recognised it so long before the world suspected it. Mornings were passed in such toil, and then the rest of the day was spent in society, which was much more tiring, although it was society on the whole extremely congenial, for the people who sought her were those with whom admiration of Blake was now a primary article of their literary conventions. She smiled sometimes that he should be the object of just those curiosities of folly, weaknesses of fashion, conventional adoption of unconventionalities, that he had tilted against from the first. But there were some who really understood.

There came a day without any letters—only a post-card from Trix. Father was not well; he had been in dreadful pain, but was now asleep. Kate was sitting at the little writing-table in the corner where members were becoming accustomed to see her, when the post-card was brought to her. She read it over and over,

and then she sprang up as if the card settled the question. She would go up-stairs and pack; if there were no boat from Southampton to-night, she would go round by Paris. Then she sat down again with an effort, ordering herself to be reasonable. He had had dreadful pain often before; it was nothing new. She had known he would have attacks of pain when she let him go. He had known it when he wanted to go away alone. She had determined to let him have his way, and would she break down at the first attack of pain and risk going to him against his will? By the evening she was thankful that she had been firm. She was dressing to dine out, with a heavy heart, when a telegram was brought to her, "Much better, no pain, hoping to work to-morrow, love, Horace." She could not but feel happy, because he was no longer in pain. It often passed off completely after it had been acute. Then, too, he had felt for her anxiety. He had taken pains to word the telegram so as to carry conviction to her mind. Her face looked brighter than it had looked since he left her. "Love, Horace." In her loneliness the words were music to her.

Kate was dining out in congenial company. The hostess was perhaps a social climber, but she was not a crude climber; she concealed the rather brutal and childish nature of the species with skill and kindliness.

She chose well for Mrs. Blake, putting her between two admirers of Horace's work, one an old-young man who ranked as a critic among an esoteric set of playgoers, and the other a real young man who had surprised the world by writing a successful biography. The biographer was named Stephen Tempest; he was tall, straight in limb, clear in glance, dark-haired.

Kate began by listening to the very old-young man, who had a voice with a chirp in it.

"So ridiculous, so prudish, such cant. . . . No one but Blake could have shown them up like that. And it's funny, isn't it? that people like old Lady Fennimore went to the play and said it was so pretty." He sniggered. "So pretty! But how did he become a dramatist? Anything hereditary account for it?" The tone was intimate and caressing. "Now with Tempest, you know, sitting on your left, we know how his talents came to him. His father was what used to be called a polished essayist—that, I imagine, is the difference between genius and talent. Genius can't be accounted for."

At last the lady he really wanted to talk to on the other side gave him her ear, and Kate was left to silence. Her hostess at that moment admired her calm dignity, her unconscious beauty; it was not the beauty of the women she generally met with. Kate's was a face hard to read, not because it was smoothly disguised, but because it bore strange matters with no apparent effort at disguise at all. Stephen Tempest, turning to her, saw with a little surprise that she was some way off in her thoughts.

"I have been in a quarrel already, so early in the meal," he began, with the appearance of being too much interested in his subject to drop it. "My neighbour is defending Purcell's *Life of Manning*, and I am attacking it."

"It was a curiously candid book," said Kate.

"No," said Stephen, "I maintain it was not candid; it was biassed, passionately biassed, and it affected candour. The world takes for granted that the biographer is always on the side of his subject. There-

fore they credit him with being truthful against his inclinations whenever he shows the faults of his hero. This man had the journalistic instinct to pose as the candid biographer."

"It is so long since I read it," said Kate; "but in any case you would never conceal the faults, would you?"

"No, never conceal what makes for a true picture," said Stephen; "but just as you may use the good qualities for idealisation, you may use the bad ones for blackening the man's character. It is a question of the proportion in which you use the facts."

"Do you think," asked Kate, "that the nearest to a man, the most intimate, could ever see him in his true proportions? If I survive my husband I shall certainly not attempt such an impossible task as his biography."

Stephen was startled, but kept himself from showing it.

"I believe you are right," he said quietly. "It would be very hard to focus what has been so near."

"Who knows what is true about anybody else?" cried Kate, not affecting any disguise to a bitterness that was perceptible.

"Or about themselves?" said Stephen, who began to feel strongly interested.

"And so," said Kate, "after all, what is the use of talking about truth?"

"That way madness lies," said Stephen, smiling. "Besides, it 's not true that we can't attain a great deal of relative truth, but neither is it true that we can ever come to the judge's summing up. The time for judging is not yet."

"That is a striking quotation; where is it from?"

Stephen stared at her for a moment only.

"Ah! I see you mean the Hebrew Scriptures, and they relegate the summing up to a future state, and I, knowing there is no future state, have a hankering after a summing up now."

"You can't in any case judge of a picture till it 's finished."

"But when is it finished?" Kate shivered.

"I don't know," said Stephen, "that we ever know exactly when it is finished. We are told by the experienced that great things may happen almost at the very end."

Kate shook her head.

"That is an idea the world has grown out of; the end is the collapse of the mind, it is the death of the faculties. Death-bed repentance is one of those fictions of religious groups of people—a man dies as he has lived."

"But the question is," said Stephen, "what has been going on in him of which we don't know? The end may be a revelation rather than a change."

"Ah!" said Kate, "generally one knows enough to see that such a change would be a farce, a thing imagined by the bystanders and suggested by them to a weakened brain. Take, for instance, a death-bed repentance, as it is commonly described. A group of people, praying hard, make the suggestion, the failing brain catches the suggestion—there is much in it to soothe the feelings and a kind of vanity is excited by it too,—the dying man plays up to his audience."

"I own," he answered, "that such theories of the power of suggestion seem to me to be extraordinarily unreal—a quite hypothetical use of science. Forgive me if I am impertinent."

"Oh, no, you are not impertinent," said Kate warmly. "Nor do I think that I am extraordinarily unreal, but I see we are going; our hostess is moving."

As Kate dawdled a few moments before going to bed that evening she thought of Stephen Tempest with interest, and as Stephen Tempest smoked a cigar in company with a friend belonging to the theatrical world in his club smoking-room he spoke of Mrs. Horace Blake.

"She has a very fine head," he said.

"Did she say how Blake is?"

"No. Is he ill?"

"He is knocked out of time for good and all in my opinion. I saw him at supper with rather a wild set just before he went away. It was pretty clear that he was n't long for this queer world, of which he has been one of the queerest inmates."

"It 's terribly sad," said Stephen. "His work is only half done. I thought he had only cleared the ground for what was to come. He has shown up hypocrisy and pharisaism; he has destroyed them with such power that I felt certain that he could construct in an equally workmanlike fashion. His literary gift is intensity. If he dies now what an enigma! I own there is no one I should like to understand as I should like to understand Blake."

"Muddy water!" said the actor. "But what bewilders me is that she should let him go away without her, and whom do you suppose he has taken with him?"

"Whom?" asked Stephen.

"Their only child—a girl hardly eighteen—and a man-nurse. Meanwhile Mrs. Blake lives on the fat

of London dinner-parties and ladies' luncheon-clubs who *fête* her daily."

"She does n't look as if she were overfed," said Stephen musingly. Here was additional mystery, and he had already felt Kate to be mysterious.

"Mind you," the actor went on, "to my certain knowledge that woman has worn herself to the bone for Horace Blake. They were as poor as rats, but I doubt if he ever wanted for anything—she did. And now they are comparatively rich she has nursed him alone for a year past. I would n't nurse Horace Blake for a week for any pay conceivable. And then she sends him off to finish a terrible illness, horrible pain, all by himself; she has thrown up the sponge at the very last minute."

"She does n't look like a woman who has broken down in any way," said Stephen.

"Well, the Blakes have always been a puzzle to me, but how I love to act his plays! The smallest part in any of them is thick with good things, and I love to see people's faces when he gives them a box on the ear on one side, and they grin and think they understand him, when slap comes a box on the opposite ear, and they are so excited they laugh from sheer pleasure at the tickling of their nerves."

"Yes, but what does he mean?" queried Tempest. "On my theory he has been bent on clearing the ground of rubbish, but he clears away a deal that 's important, if it gets in his way, at the same time. However, if he means to build afterwards, I understand it."

"Bless me, I can't take it all so seriously; you attach too much importance to this literary business altogether. Live with us a bit; meet Horace Blake at

a few supper-parties, only, poor devil, he won't attend many more. The papers talk of a complete rest, but poor old Horace can't rest till he 's full of dust from head to foot. His worms will have more go in them than other people's."

"Mrs. Blake hardly looks the figure of a guest at theatrical supper-parties."

"No, she does n't fancy that side of things; besides—" The actor checked himself. Tempest was much more occupied just now with Mrs. Blake than in gathering information about her husband's reputation.

"The daughter must be a remarkable girl to be sent off like that."

"A beautiful child, with a great look of Blake, nothing of Mrs. Blake. But a mere child. I don't think she understood that her father was ill even. I was there the day before they started, and it gave me the hump to watch them. No one owning to the truth. Mrs. Blake's eyes as large as plates, and Horace flashing lights out of his like danger-signals, while he talked, talked, talked of the play that he would finish over there, and about Trix's hats and coats and skirts. The lovely Trix to the fore all the time, hapless infant. How her mother could allow it beats me."

That was all that interested Tempest in their talk. He was left wondering how to see Mrs. Blake again.

XIII

BUT WHEN YOU FORGIVE?

STEPHEN TEMPEST need not have been anxious. With Kate it had been a case of friendship at first sight. There was a genuine kindness, a power of sympathy in Stephen, that made him attractive to most people. In her usual course of life she was not impulsive, but everything about her was unusual now. She was not long in finding out the little there was to know about Stephen Tempest. The evening they first met, her hostess had explained him.

"Isn't he delightful? I 'm so glad you felt the charm. I 'll tell you all about him. His people are old-fashioned small county people in Norfolk. His father, who died last year, wrote the most delightful essays. And I 'm told Stephen is very like him. Stephen got a scholarship for Eton and another for New College, and he took a first in Greats. The eldest brother is in Canada, and the mother looks after the old house and property. Both the sisters were older and married some time ago, and now Stephen has made a real success with his Life of Nortondale. He is a barrister, but I think the writing will have to pay his way."

It was all quite ordinary, though above the average no doubt. Kate was more accustomed to the extraordinary than to the ordinary, and ordinary things were very restful to her. Stephen was the sort of man that schools and universities and families want to turn

out. Horace and most of his friends were not at all what any sane system would be intended to produce. But there was also something in Tempest's nature that the most admirable system could not produce—something that drew the hungry soul of Blake's wife to his. Sometimes in middle life we rest on a nature that has not yet been tested, whereas young people look more warily for support to those that have stood the stress.

Kate's instinct that Stephen was rather simple as to evil was a true one. He knew good far better.

She wrote and asked Stephen to come and see her, and they had tea together in a quiet corner of the club drawing-room.

They discussed biography. Kate had now read Stephen's successful specimen of it, and she had been thoroughly satisfied. She liked the book for its candour and thoroughness. Besides, the writer was keen, and he took, if not infinite, immense pains. It was a cultivated mind, and the preoccupations of culture often prevent a man from feeling the necessity for a clear view of ultimate realities. He was dimly trying to get a reasoned basis for the artistic things that appealed to him; but he was more occupied with the artistic things in themselves than with the metaphysics needed to explain them. Both his artistic precision and his rather fluid, mental view of the universe made it easy for him to keep off the corners of Kate's bigotry. He could point out fresh beauties, fresh even to her, in Blake's works, and he did not come to close quarters as to subjects on which they must have disagreed. He had no sympathy with violence or destruction; he could smile at cant and humbug when she could only speak of them with triumphant bitterness. But when

Tempest tried to get her to support his theory that Blake's destructive work was only the prelude to his constructive, he got nothing from her. To her destruction was the main part of the business. She had been educated to appreciate destructive work. Her father had been a scholarly, refined recluse, but he, too, had had the zeal of a crusader against shams and false faiths. Only Kate's father had lived on a very different plane from Horace. He had been in his day likened to the "saint of rationalism." Horace had been his pupil before he was Kate's lover, but Horace had a very different nature; he had known the things against which St. John Coniston revolted in a way quite different from that in which the scientist had known them. There was a feverish energy in his repudiations; and before he died his father-in-law had shocks and disgusts that went unuttered to his grave. Certainly, towards the end his experience of his son-in-law changed his tone not a little. He became more respectful towards traditional beliefs. This change had no effect on Kate, who had never looked back from his earlier teaching,—to live with courage and without illusions was her ideal; to be virtuous had been her father's practice and her own.

Rather suddenly, after a silence in the midst of their talk, Kate asked Stephen if he were a Christian.

"Oh, yes," he answered; "my people are all Christians. Not that my grandfather would acknowledge me as a Christian, or that I could be bothered with the dogmas that absorbed his cantankerous old heart."

"You take the ethical side alone?" Kate's voice was unsympathetic to a degree.

"I have found great help in the Gospel, and even in

Church services, since I was a boy," said Stephen simply.

"To me the ethics are immoral; take the Atonement, for instance."

Stephen was uncomfortable. Her tone was harsh now, and he had not yet settled precisely what he thought on these certainly difficult points.

"I believe," he said, "that theologians have worried at all these questions until the early Christians would not know them again."

"The forgiveness of sins," pursued Kate with intense antagonism.

"You agree with the dramatist," said Stephen, who wished to change the subject, "'Forgiveness is a beggar's refuge,—we must all pay our own debts.'"

"Heartily," said Kate.

Stephen frowned in a puzzled way.

"But when you forgive things yourself," he said, "you do not feel immoral?"

He was not thinking of her, but of some small experience of his own. He saw her flush as she turned quickly away. When she looked round there was a different light in her face.

"That is true," she said gently, and they both changed the conversation a little quickly, a little eagerly, as if the ground they stood on was slippery. But he had no suspicion then that his companion had had so large an experience of that act of forgiveness.

They returned after that to the ethics of biography, and there Stephen knew his own thoughts well. It was probably during that talk that it flashed on Kate's mind for the first time that Stephen might prove, if not the ideal biographer for whom she had been half-consciously in search, at least a sympathetic as well as

a capable one. She had rejected in her own mind much more distinguished men, and men who knew Horace well. There had been something against nearly all of them: either they were too full of their own theories and themselves, or they were unsympathetic and people she could never work with. By the time he left her she had put Stephen down on the list of possible biographers.

That evening Kate received the mass of untidy papers on which Horace had scribbled the last act of the last play—the astonishing result of the three days of frantic energy which she, too, believed to be the last flare. She was giddy while she read it, with excitement and admiration, but she had also some moments of uncertainty. Was the violence, the absence of reticence, as fine as the suggestiveness of his other work? Was it far the greatest thing he had done, or was it a kind of over-dramatic magic-lantern exaggeration of all that had gone before? It would be futile, of course, to show it to the censor a mile off; it must be published in book form, as Horace had said, and in time the public would force it on to the stage.

She sat reading, her hands pressed on her forehead, her elbows supported on the writing-table in the library of her club. Silence was absolute: only one other member was there, studying her evening paper as if it were a duty she must perform to the public. In the midst of sedate, sober comfort sat Kate, intoxicated, over-wrought, actually trembling as she turned the pages of the curious writing so familiar to her. The air was thick with the things she was reading. If the other member had been of a high-strung temperament, some kind of thought transference must have troubled her also.

At the same hour Horace was saying to the *curé* of St. Jean des Pluies with a little shrug:

"That was my spiritual experience on the *Fête Dieu*, M. le Curé."

XIV

CAN'T THEY LET ME DIE IN PEACE?

NOTHING in the letters from St. Jean des Pluies betrayed to Kate the state of exhaustion to which Horace had been reduced during the three days in which he was writing the last act of *The Burning Bush*. Each evening he had sent her a postcard on which was scrawled "Working well," or "Getting on with work," and then "Shall finish to-night." He had suddenly forbidden Roberts to write to Mrs. Blake, and he did not write again himself for two or three days after that, and, by the time he wrote, he had entered upon a new phase of thought and feeling as to his own condition. He had become deadly tired of the farce of pretending that he was only at St. Jean des Pluies for a few weeks' rest before resuming his normal life at home. He knew that such an attitude was now almost grotesque. The night after his visit to the *curé* he owned to Roberts, and soon after to Trix, that he was very ill indeed. This acknowledgment in itself brought a sort of peace; as every acknowledgment of truth does at first bring peace; and in this calmer condition of mind the despairing fear which had made him reckless in his disregard of orders or advice really diminished. Facing the fact that he was really very ill, that he was in the grip of a terrible disease, he began to tell himself that his case could not possibly be called hopeless. He had seen men quite as ill, even more ill than he was, get back to normal

conditions of life and action. This disease had in it a most mysterious element which puzzled the doctors. Out of their very ignorance there was ground for hope. His imagination had fastened on the condemnation he had seen in the eyes of Sir Thomas Goodstone and the other doctors—a condemnation conveyed in their looks, their manner, their whole attitude, while their lips had said smooth things. He had tried in vain to persuade himself and all about him that he had understood nothing beyond what was told him in so many words; he had tried to occupy his mind with anything that could make him forget the state of his body. It was impossible to ignore that state now, and he began to realise and to curse the excessive rashness with which he had thrown away his chances of getting better. He was worse, but then he had made himself worse by flatly disobeying the order to rest, by disregarding everything that Roberts had said to him that did not fit in with his own wishes. He had not given himself a chance, but he would give himself every chance now. Roberts had given warning and no wonder; but perhaps Roberts would retract that warning if he saw the change on which Horace was now determined. He bent his will and his imagination towards the fight with the disease. That should now be his real occupation, and he would allow nothing to interfere with it. He saw the dire necessity of self-control if any treatment was to be of the slightest use. The very intensity with which he determined to be calm and cheerful made him begin to feel as if he were so already. He would try to be interested in the little details of his daily life with Trix and make the best of everything. Such a condition of mind would be of real use in helping the forces of health in their hard fight.

After this was resolved upon, Horace wrote again to his wife and the letter was full of the great change, of his absolute obedience to the doctor's orders, and of how he was feeling better already in consequence. Roberts, with full permission, also wrote in the same sense to Mrs. Blake, and so did Trix; Roberts professionally and Trix in all simplicity were bent on helping to produce this atmosphere of confidence and cheerfulness. No good nurse is without the power of suggestion, and Roberts was now employing his to the full in his treatment of Horace. It was not unnatural that he supposed that the fact of his having given notice had produced an improvement in the manners of his charge. He still told himself that he meant to leave before very long, but now that Mr. Blake was more reasonable and was doing some credit to the care bestowed on him, he was in no great hurry to go back to England. Not that he could ever like his patient; indeed, he had disliked him almost from the first. He could have said, too, that he had known many a sick man nasty when in pain, but none quite so nasty as this one. However, one evening a new aspect of Horace had no little effect on the view Roberts took of him.

Blake had gone down to the village in search of distraction and found it in choosing some of the Quimper pottery that was sold by a quaint old woman in a tiny, ill-lit shop. Trix coming up from the shore hurried to join him and put her arm through his. While walking she had been thinking a little bitterly that her mother ought to be there; she could not understand such a desertion. She had never been drawn into close intimacy with her mother; at times

she had almost felt as if she were being kept aloof. Hitherto, being, like most undeveloped people, prone to accept suggestion, she had taken her aunt's implied view that Mrs. Blake was absorbed in her work as the great man's wife; but now that theory could not fit the position any more. Trix felt like the Swiss Guard at the Tuileries:—the only truly loyal sentinel companion and friend to the sick man. The rôle had its attractions.

"I have got a new idea, Trix," said Horace cheerfully as they moved slowly on. "I am getting tired of the boat of our grasping friend; I want to move about on shore. A *fiacre* would knock me to pieces, and there 's not a decent motor to be got in these benighted parts. My idea is to ask your mother to send us out a really good motor; she must get advice as to which is the smoothest that is made."

"Oh, father! what fun—if there is one that will run quite smoothly enough." Her white forehead wrinkled anxiously for a moment.

"Roberts believes that a really good motor shakes no more than a bath-chair. We could then at last see the country, and now that it is getting hotter the air would do me good."

Trix was enchanted, and suggested half a dozen places farther south that she had been longing to see.

As they neared the hotel, talking eagerly, they noticed Roberts in conversation with a stranger.

"A journalist," said Horace, "prying for an interview; the type is unmistakable. I wonder what Mr. Roberts is so kind as to tell him?"

Horace was right in deciding that the stranger was a journalist. And it was, in fact, the visit of the journalist that made Roberts retract rather humbly

his notice of throwing up the care of Horace Blake. The press had a positive fascination for him; he had always enjoyed press allusions to the men of position whom he had nursed; he had supplied little paragraphs himself as to their health and their movements. He was quite astonished to find that Blake was worthy of a great London paper sending a man all the way from Paris to St. Jean des Pluies to obtain an interview with him.

He told Horace with a certain beam of satisfaction that Mr. Purl was asking for an interview.

"Can't they even let me die in peace?" asked Horace a little dramatically, and he was at last a hero to his man-nurse.

To Purl's indignation and Roberts's surprise, Horace refused to see him—absolutely refused! So Roberts was interviewed instead and gave the account of Blake's health, which appeared shortly after, and which was dismissed with incredulity by anyone who had seen the sick man just lately in London.

It was a great effort on Blake's part to make that refusal, and the true cause of his making it was that he had become uncertain what he would reply if he were questioned as to his new play. He was longing to talk of it, longing to give it the first advertisement, but he could n't do it. When Purl had left, he suddenly told Roberts that he would see the man after all. Roberts wanted to telegraph to the junction to stop him, but this Horace would not allow.

A few days followed which were spent by Horace in carrying out the determination to live entirely by rule. The great idea was maintained that now there was to be a complete change; he explained to Roberts, and Roberts constantly encouraged the notion, that it was his own fault that he was not much better and stronger.

Now he would be "a really good boy" and do what he was told. Roberts and Trix persevered in producing this atmosphere of confidence and cheerfulness. The symptoms continued to improve and each slight improvement was registered and discussed with Roberts and made much of, until Horace began to boast a little to one or two visitors to the hotel whom he had decided to find amusing as there was no one else to be got. These visitors did not show perfect tact in response, but then, of course, they knew nothing about the case. Two small happenings surprised Roberts about this time, and probably surprised Horace himself almost as much. Blake was sitting in the front garden of the hotel before going to bed, to which he always went now before his dinner, when he saw one of the servants rather roughly turning away a beggar from the gate.

"What did she want?" he asked the man in French, and received for answer that she was no better than she should be.

An odd frown settled on his face. A good many people were no better than they should be, he told Roberts an hour later.

"Go to the *curé* to-morrow," he went on, "find out if he knows her, and if so what can be done for her. Take four louis, only don't let him come and bother me here."

Horace was nasty in his manner to the servant who had turned the beggar away, and thereupon the man hated him; Blake could be quite odious to those he disliked and could convey his dislike with a detestable contempt in his big eyes.

There was a small table in Horace's bedroom on which lay various albums that he had forbidden Trix

to open. After dinner he used to amuse himself with one or other of them, unless he had a good novel on hand. Roberts, though no "plaster saint," had his own standards and he disliked those albums intensely. One night Horace noticed the look on his face as he brought the books to the bedside, and his manner of dropping them, as if he were dropping something nauseous.

Horace was lying passively on his pillows; the mysterious element of inquiry and receptivity came suddenly into the face that had been unusually blank. Then he looked excited.

"I 've half a mind to clear that much out." Then, lifting the book on his knees, he dragged out a photograph and tore it in two.

"Come on, Roberts," he cried, "tear and cut up that red book—see which of us goes quickest." He looked very strange at that moment. His eyes glittered, his thin hands grabbed and tore nervously; the jacket of his pyjamas was unfastened and showed all his wasted chest. The bed was in disorder, pillows, blankets and sheets thrown about, and the litter of the torn cards and papers lay in wild confusion.

"Hercules turned a river into a stable," he said to Roberts, as if imparting interesting information, "but there 's no river available in this case and nothing short of a river, I suppose, could do the job. Still, a little tidying up does no harm."

"We 'll have a fire," he said a moment later, and he seemed like a boy watching the weeds burn as Roberts coaxed the stove into its work of destruction. But weeds burn so easily compared to prints and photographs and *feuilletons*. Then the stove smoked and Horace coughed; he suddenly changed.

"You need n't burn any more here; take it all away and destroy it in your own room."

Roberts had some difficulty in extinguishing the burning papers in the stove. Horace had put his feet out of bed and was sitting up. Roberts left the half-burnt papers in a heap on the tiles and lifted Horace's shrunken limbs on to the bed and helped him to cover them with his pyjamas. A slight smile curled the pale lips.

"They had ceased to amuse me," he said; and then added with a half-laugh: "It is our vices that leave us, not we who leave our vices."

Roberts again felt him to be unpleasant, but he was now determined to make the best of him.

The passengers on the boat from Southampton were annoyed at being kept waiting while a motor was disembarked. There was a little pomp and excitement about the landing of the motor, it was so supremely new and smart and effective. It stood for all that was rich and successful in the eyes of a group of workmen on the quay. It was evidently to supply further pleasure to "one of the animals of millionaires" who were infinitely happy in their self-gratifications at the expense of those who laboured for a bare subsistence. It occupied the greater part of the small steamer that plied between St. Malo and the town nearest to St. Jean des Pluies. Roberts met the mechanic who had brought it over at the pier, and thoroughly enjoyed seeing the splendid thing receiving the attentions of the boatmen, who had a more benevolent view of wealthy visitors than the workmen at St. Malo. It was not the least upset by the crossing and it was soon brought in triumph to the little hotel

in St. Jean des Pluies. Horace was not to go downstairs any earlier than usual. The fervour for rule and discipline was still maintained, only he could admire it from the window. Even from the road anybody might see that it was not the face of the typical millionaire that looked out on his new possession. Roberts and Trix were so fully occupied with the machine that they had no fresh impression of the face at the window. The kindly American and another visitor who had come out to look at the exquisite, panting, dark-hued thing in the road, glanced up at the window, and then significantly at each other. One of them bent down to feel the tyre nearest him.

"A good make; I guess he 'll hardly wear it out."

There was a little crowd to see the start in the evening, and Horace quite enjoyed the fuss. He looked and felt less ghastly thin in his fur coat, which he had put on as a fresh breeze was blowing off the water. The drive into Dinan was glorious, the deep green country was a wonderful refreshment, and there came flashes of the view of one of the most beautiful rivers in the world. Three quarters of an hour passed in sheer enjoyment, and then, almost before he knew it, Horace was beginning to exert his will to keep down the consciousness of a gnawing pain. Roberts, sitting by the mechanic, was in all his glory, Trix was in bliss. It was a tough fight before he let them know that the motion was too much for him. Instantly the nearest possible spot in the road was taken for turning back. The return was terrible; from the moment that he had to give up and go back Blake broke down. Swiftly, surely, they made for the hotel as fast as possible. They lifted him out at the end of an appalling forty minutes, during which the helpless Trix was crying as

if her heart would break. Roberts simply carried him up-stairs like a child. It was a ghastly burden he laid on the bed. Then he gave more morphia than he had ventured to give before.

The face of the American who had seen Blake carried in was white with horror as he hurried to find the manageress to beg her to come to Trix, who was in the garden making perfectly useless efforts to become calm. The brisk, efficient Frenchwoman was better for Trix, as he had supposed, than any too sympathetic lady visitor. Roberts cursed his own folly in having allowed Blake to get into the motor, but he had so often found that it was far the least trying form of motion for a sick man. That night he explained this in self-defence to the American.

"It may have been a chance attack," suggested the latter.

"Possibly," said Roberts; "he had been very free from pain for some time."

"Say," observed the other, "Horace Blake goes up and down the scale farther and quicker than men of less imagination. I always wished to be a dramatist, but I conclude that a man pays in himself for the privilege."

"And those who have him in charge pay too," said Roberts grimly. He was dreading the work before him.

"Curious," continued the analytical American to himself after Roberts, who was not analytical, had left him, "you 'd think that when a man was as ill as that he 'd be too far gone for the imaginative side to hurt him much. But I conclude that Blake will make the worst of dying because he 'll realise all round more than most of us would."

XV

NOT VANQUISHED

ANY man or woman who hated Horace Blake might have had a very lust of vengeance satiated if he or she could have known what he suffered that night. The bodily pain grew less; the morphia dulled his consciousness for a time, but then his mind became terribly awake. Physically, though the pain was far less, he was very wretched; but that was nothing to the agony of disillusion. The pain had been in a different part of the body and there were other symptoms of which he now knew the meaning. Roberts had made much of the fact that the pain had hitherto been entirely on one side—now it had spread. He had made Blake think too much of the improvement in other symptoms; to-night that improvement was not only not maintained, but in one or two details the same symptoms were worse than they had been yet.

Roberts had not understood the mind with which he had to deal. He had seen the real value of any fresh hope in this case, indeed, Mr. Blake's state had shown a surprising improvement during his sanguine mood. But the very keenness with which Horace had studied his own case involved a serious danger for a being so cursed with the gift of imagination. At a touch the pendulum went full swing in the opposite direction. It was a night of awful fear, horribly embittered by disappointment. He was hateful in his rage and scorn at the bubble that had just burst, and at the man who

had helped to swell it. Any attempt to reason with him, to explain, for instance, that the run in the motor had had quite probably only an accidental and temporarily bad effect, was only to provoke him to a state of miserable exasperation that suggested to Roberts for the first time the possibility that he might go out of his mind. He resolved to write to Sir Thomas Goodstone that if the patient's brain became affected, he must have a mental nurse to help him.

Towards morning Blake fell asleep, and when he woke late the last storm of rage that Roberts ever witnessed in him was spent, and there was something awful in his complete silence.

Trix had never seen him like this before. She was disappointed and a little chagrined at his total inattention to her. The young ministering angel had not learned to follow far without response. He paid no heed when she offered to read to him; he never noticed when she sat doing nothing but waiting to be of use on this divine morning, with the sky so light and one gem of blue sea suggesting what the rest must be like that lay out of sight.

At last he told her abruptly to go out, nor did he see her again till the evening.

Roberts, looking in a little later in the morning, after one glance at Horace, concluded that he must be in great bodily pain.

"I will bring the morphia," he said. Horace let him go in silence. Why not morphia for this mental agony too? But when Roberts came back, Horace refused it.

"No," he said, "I am not in great pain."

Roberts left him, and Horace lay with open eyes fixed on vacancy.

For two days and nights there was little apparent change in his mental condition, and he did not seem to the man-nurse to be materially the worse; in particular the pain, which was not acute, only affected one side as it had done before. But Blake lay on his bed most of those two days, not even pretending to read; he avoided speaking to Roberts, and constantly sent Trix away very gently, but in a way that she could not resist. The fact was that her presence only added to his suffering.

On the third morning his face horrified Roberts afresh.

At moments in the night that was just over, Blake's anguish had passed beyond conscious thought. It had been merely a horrible tearing at his whole being. Such another night, he thought, would drive him mad. He had felt in the awful stillness as if he must be making some great noise, that he must positively control himself or he would be overheard. But he knew now in the daylight that he had, in fact, made no sound.

As the morning wore on he was thinking of Trix.

"If she knew the truth; if she knew what I am!"

If the child could understand what he was, what he had done, what he had no doubt he would do again if life had to come over again, where would her love for him be then? One woman who had known too much about him was dead—had died of knowing him too well, he told himself. All his life fame, success, work, had concealed so much from himself, had even helped him to keep to an external view of Horace Blake. There had always been people to praise him, and then lately Trix had come to love him. He saw

her through the window go down the garden, a great bitterness in his face as he watched her.

"How will she bear it when she knows?"

This last consolation he had planned for himself, this conquest of Trix's affections, had begun to hurt him terribly. His imagination presented the contrast between his daughter's ideal of him and the reality with much of the intensity that had always been the secret of his force in literature. Would not Trix loathe the real Horace? Was it not loathsome that a man should have lived and lied like that?

It was the third night after the drive to Dinan; the horrible succession of ideas that seemed to have fallen into a kind of rhythm in the regularity with which they succeeded each other in Horace's mind never ceased. It was not a nightmare; it was the terrible clearness of sleeplessness. One after another they came. First the fear of pain, then the longing—the unspeakable longing—for one year at least of life and health, then the fear of death, then the thought of Trix after his death if she should come to know the truth. That always threw him back on his past life, and there followed a slow, long procession of memories over which he had no control. From his past would arise a haunting belief in God as the avenger which was not quenched by a dreary sense of unbelief in the creed of his childhood. Suddenly he would loathe the rotten helplessness of his will. It was as if he realised that his moral being had no kind of support in itself; and this was so vivid that it would feel as if the very bed that held his body had something of the same awful instability. Vainly would he half welcome the phantoms of an unclean imagination, and

sink so low as to regret the pleasure that they could no longer excite. Such was the long procession of ideas which would come full circle, out of which there seemed to be no escape. Each idea, horrible as it was in itself, always seemed to suggest that a worse one was to come after it. Nothing could be done that was of any good—he found himself explaining this to his own consciousness—except on some gigantic scale, and a bruised fly was as equal to saving a great world catastrophe as he was to doing anything on a gigantic scale. He had made his bed years ago and he must lie on it.

The thought of what he had promised Kate when Trix was a small child worried him, worried him as a cat worries a mouse. His mind tossed about under it without finding rest. He had promised that he would never teach Trix evil, never teach her life, never take a father's rights. What must Kate have realised to be true of him before exacting such a promise? To satisfy her he had said hastily: "I 'll never be alone with her if that will pacify you." It was the view of himself that that had implied that now pressed upon him. All the success, the silly press-cuttings even, had been a disguise of himself in his own thoughts, his delight in his work, his infinite capacity for taking pains, his wish to satisfy Kate's ambitions had all made up a figure of Horace Blake that was sufficient for working purposes in the daytime of life. Now he was just himself alone, absolutely alone. And before him was death, agony, with none of his fears or susceptibilities dulled by illness—rather increased in acuteness.

He remembered a passage in Gibbon as to the sufferings of the Romans from the barbarians. Gib-

bon said that the horror was increased by the exquisite sensibility of the sufferers. Extreme sensibility! how that described the exposed nerves of his self-indulged mind and body! It was no doubt, Horace's strong gift of imagination that made such a mental agony as it is to be hoped that few have to suffer.

"Sleep, sleep, sleep," he said, not knowing that he did so.

He got up and lit his candle, and then feebly moved to the switch of the electric light and flooded the room with cold clearness. He took his watch out of a drawer. It was one o'clock. He went back to bed, and sat up leaning against the brass bar behind him. The ticking of his watch, though it had been put away again, was loud in the stillness, but for once he liked it. "I can't be in Hell already," he said to himself. "I wish someone would move; how horribly well they sleep."

He seemed to see all the healthy figures under that roof, so full of life in their sleep, and he fancied them waking, stretching themselves, getting up, doing things, while he would go on just the same with the same thoughts, and the same miserable death-in-life, getting worse and worse. He wished he could at least hear other people moving. He wondered if the people in the hotel, if the waiters, the fat cook, pitied him. If they did it was no good, it could not come near enough to be any good. He tried to say things to himself such as some kind man in his own world would have tried to say.

"After all, I may get better. I might do more to get well; there are doctors besides the men I saw in London. I may be going to live a little longer; after all, I have done good work; after all, the world will call me great."

He made a great effort to fill his mind with this last thought, and to help himself to do so he got out of bed again, and slowly holding on to the furniture as he passed, he reached the writing-table, and took up a huge, heavy scrap-book of press-cuttings. As he did so, he seemed to see all the wretched little scraps, with little swellings from the paste, stuck all over the walls of the room. He lifted it up; he was determined to get back to bed with it, and to read them steadily to keep his mind full of them. He stepped forward, and then the book slipped from his hands, and fell two feet in front of him, while pieces of blue paper with the newest cuttings on them dropped about on the ground. He bent to pick it up, but he could not. Then he knew that there was no refuge, no distraction; he looked across the room at his tumbled bed, as if it had been the rack on which he was to be stretched.

And then, as there was nothing else to help him, in utter terror of being alone any longer, Horace knelt down at the writing-table and cried for mercy—even as a dog would cry if it were able, to be spared pain. It appeared to him at the moment that God might really spurn him, that this tortured, unclean human animal might be impossibly repulsive in a great light of absolute truth. In his despairing cry to God he first knew for certain that he believed. After that there rose in him a spark of generosity that demanded love and forgiveness rather than cessation of suffering. It seemed as if in response to that last appeal his soul was transfixed with a new agony. In the same instant, with all the strength of his weak will, he abandoned his whole being to welcome this sense of an infinite anguish. He was then astonished to find the pain made bearable by the infusion of a mysterious joy.

All the poets, and all the saints, make mock of the divisions of time. Perhaps the action of the soul while Horace knelt against the table was as long, as full of movement—who has words to express these things?—as the whole of his life up to that moment. The impressions Roberts received during the number of times the clock ticked while Horace was kneeling in the next room might be said to amount to this—he thought, of course, being a nurse, before he was half awake, that somebody wanted him; then as no sound followed the fall of the album, being wider awake, he began to think that the noise had been part of a dream. He certainly had been dreaming. Of course, if that were the case, he could go to sleep again—a very pleasant conclusion. He listened, and not a sound could he hear besides the ticking of his own alarum, set to five o'clock. He turned on his side, saying to himself that he might disturb Mr. Blake for nothing if he moved, but directly he tried to go to sleep his mind misgave him. He got up and moved very softly into the next room. As he opened the door he heard a scraping sound; the room was in a blaze of electric light. Blake was half on a chair by the writing-table; he was in a sort of crumpled heap between the chair and the table, and his eyes were shut and tears lay below them on the wasted cheeks. Horace opened his eyes and saw the young man standing by him, strong, vigorous and kindly; he held his hand out to him for help.

"I 'm sorry I woke you, Roberts."

"Nonsense, sir," said Roberts, touched by his gentleness.

Roberts helped him back to bed, raised him in strong hands, shook up his pillows, and rearranged the

bed-clothes. Horace watched him with a sense of relief, and felt his touch to be firm and tender. Then Roberts put his arm under the sharp shoulder-blades and held him a little forward from his pillows.

"That 's nice," said Horace.

Roberts sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I 've got many a patient to sleep like this," he said.

"The pain is worse," said Horace faintly, "but I don't want morphia to-night. If I get the morphia into me now it may prevent my doing all I have to do. I must keep it for worse times than this."

Roberts very gently massaged his back as he held him.

"In strong arms," was Horace's last thought as he fell asleep.

Roberts replaced him gently on the pillows without his stirring in the least. It was twenty minutes to three. He saw all the press-cuttings lying on the floor, things that he regarded with intense respect.

"What 'll they be when he dies?" he thought, with a certain excitement. "Poor fellow! he won't get much pleasure out of them then."

It was five o'clock when Horace woke. He woke up with the feeling with which he had fallen asleep of someone supporting him, of someone with him in his loneliness, and he said: "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He did not know at once why he had said it, but at the same moment he felt an atmosphere of a strange peace. He felt that the sun was shining on the sea outside. He lay resting, with the contentment of one to whom rest has become a rare luxury. It seemed at first as if some enormous task had been done for him, and that he had nothing

to do but to lie there. Presently he tried not to shrink from the sense of efforts that must be made, ordeals that must be gone through.

At five o'clock Roberts usually brought him tea, but he had overslept himself. Horace did not rouse him; the time did not seem long though he was very thirsty. At last, anxious and remorseful, Roberts brought it. He opened the windows wide; the sun was shining brilliantly on the water and on the white sand of the shores of innumerable islets.

Horace lay back; he did not know that he was smiling.

"You have slept well, sir?"

"Very well."

He drank his tea rather quickly.

"I want to dress," he said.

At seven o'clock the *curé* said his Mass. He, too, had had much pain in the night. He walked feebly to the church and looked, as he felt, much depressed. When he came out of the sacristy to say Mass he saw the wasted face and figure of the strange Englishman whom he had watched for in vain since their one interview.

Horace was leaning heavily on the *prie-dieu* chair, his eyes fixed on the Tabernacle. At once the aspect of life changed for the *curé;* the sunshine was justified in its brightness, and he went up to the altar, his heart singing within him.

From the first words of the Mass Horace was almost overwhelmed by the strangest, sweetest, saddest sense of familiarity. He knew it all so well—the *Confiteor*, the *Kyrie Eleison*, the *Credo*, and the warning note of the bell at the *Sanctus*. At length he came to the very central action of the Sacrifice; he bowed his

soul in a heart-broken humiliation at the foot of the Cross of the Lord Who had taken upon Him the iniquities of us all.

Mass was over, and Horace did not move. He was reciting those mysterious verses of the *Miserere*, which he had learnt so easily and lightly in his boyhood:

> "Ecce enim veritatem dilexisti: incerta et occulta sapientiae tuae manifestati mihi.
>
> "Asperges me hyssopo et mundabor: lavabis me et super nivem dealbabor.
>
> "Auditui meo dabis gaudium et laetitiam: et exultabunt ossa humiliata. . . .
>
> "Cor mundum crea in me, Deus: et spiritum rectum innova in visceribus meis."

"Thou shalt make me hear of joy and gladness." It was as if the most terrible of sinners could make a claim to receive joy and gladness and uplifting from humiliation.

"Create in me a clean heart." Blake in the intense feeling of his immense discovery believed with trembling joy that even that was possible.

In many records of human life there are found the phenomena of a sudden repentance. But wherever and whenever it takes place, and whether it is distorted and exaggerated, or infinitely peaceful, there is always this element of joy. It is not so when men repent of evil done to each other. Human forgiveness is received, however thankfully, without that mysterious sense of a great expansion of the soul and an infinitely meek triumph. It is written in the legend of a fallen nun that "Only Heaven means crowned, not vanquished, when it says 'Forgiven.'"

XVI

I AM ALSO HAPPY

THAT same evening the *curé* was in his front garden admiring a stiff bed of geraniums edged by large smooth white stones from the beach, when the gate in the wall that separated his demesne from the road was opened, and he saw the sick Englishman leaning heavily on his servant's arm.

Horace made an effort to stand alone.

"You can go now," he said to Roberts; and then he turned to M. le Curé and bowed.

"How am I to get up there?" he asked with a smile, glancing at the steps that mounted to the front door, and then down at his own feeble limbs.

"That is not necessary," the *curé* answered; "it is warm. We will sit on the bench looking out to sea."

That the *curé* could admire the red geraniums was no doubt an æsthetic weakness; but that weakness did not mean that he was not in the deepest communication with the wild nature of his native coasts.

Horace was breathless when he sank down on the bench. It was in the alley of hornbeams opposite a cutting through the branches—a cutting that framed the view of three little islands that thus separated from the others gained unusual importance and individuality.

"I was at Mass to-day," he said. "I was little more than a boy when I last heard Mass."

Suddenly the red face of the *vicaire* appeared above a large armchair that he carried easily in strong arms.

Horace flushed, and then, as the big hands of the *vicaire* settled the old cushions for him to rest on, he smiled his gratitude with a sweetness that instantly attached to him the imagination of the excitable Breton. Or it may be that the man, with his own spark of genius, recognised by some mysterious intuition the greatness of the dying stranger, and had a sudden knowledge of their kinship.

It was a real relief to lie back on the rather musty cushions after the hard bench.

"And so," said Horace, as the *vicaire* hastened away down the pleached alley, "I am tired."

"That was to be expected," said the *curé*.

"But I am also happy."

"That, too, was to be expected."

"But I have no right to be happy."

"Certainly not." The *curé* was silent for a moment. "I believe the tears of Magdalen were tears of joy. You shed them at Mass this morning."

"Mass of which I knew every word, every gesture, every action, as if I had attended it unbroken all those years. The familiarity, the home atmosphere, stung me—traitor as I am—until I forgot, all but—" He paused.

"Yes," said the *curé*, "I know."

"You cannot know," said Horace passionately. "How can it be right that *I* should be gloriously happy? I have the same unclean body and the same unclean mind I had yesterday. I have sent souls to the hell in which I believe to-day. The lowest standards of the self-indulgent man of the world would condemn me—one woman died of understanding me. And my

sins are not things of the past. Up to the end I have sinned, knowing what I did. I came here with a half-notion that here I might possibly make up my accounts with another world. And then the moment I came in touch with the religion of my childhood, I felt partly fascinated, but much more repelled. I made use deliberately of the attraction and the revolt as an experience for a play—and that although I knew I was dying. Then tell me, M. le Curé, how is it just or right that to-day I have been embraced by absolute holiness. Suddenly in the midst of Mass I felt as if somebody must chase the unclean animal out of the church, and yet . . . the whole world sang gloriously in my soul and I passed beyond that chant into what I dare not speak of if I knew how."

"It is God's will," said the *curé*. "David sinned an intolerable sin, a cruel, hideous sin, and the *Te Deum* has less of joy in it than the *Miserere*. It is a mystery beyond our understanding."

"Or is it a delusion?" Horace's light eyes seemed to burn his anxiety into the *curé's* mind, as if he would sear him with hot iron.

"Is it," he cried, "the last trick of my imagination? Is it that as my reasoning powers are weakened the influences of my childhood control me, and I passively receive the light that was once in me? Is there not in the death and decay of Nature the most glorious colouring, and may there not be something analogous to that in the human brain that produces one last great illusion of beauty and glory for the imagination? There might be some last flare of vitality that combines in its vision all the most beautiful ideas that have ever been impressed on the brain in the past. I can see it all. I can almost account for myself, for

all this spiritual experience, in an analysis of that kind. And then have not bad men died with splendid sentiments on their lips? Have I not known of absurd religious excitements, unwholesome, leading to what is almost immoral when men are well? How can I tell that if I were alive and strong it would not be the same with me? I am a wreck, and my dramatic imagination may be in strange possession. By to-morrow the joy of this morning may be gone; it is waning now, and the most hideous visions may succeed it. The beauty of the corpse of my mind may turn to the last horror of putrefaction."

The *curé* was quite silent.

"It might be so," he said gently, "only you and I know it is not."

"It might be so," said Horace; "and, M. le Curé, does it not seem more probable that I should be in delusion than that I should have in fact my soul glorified, and my heart full of love after a whole existence of blasphemy and animalism? My cry to God was no better than a dog's cry! No! a dog's cry would be infinitely less despicable. I had to be driven. I made my cry under torture; I was on the rack; there was nothing in it that was not ignoble."

"Let us not confuse things," said the *curé* very gently. "You are afraid of believing in your own happiness; be not afraid; that love that fills you with joy will presently try you with fire. It is possible to reason anything away; it is impossible to contrast our own experience with that of other men. But let us say that you are passing through a fit of imagination, and let us make use of it so far as it is good. Let us be kind and patient and merciful and self-denying, and see if our dreams cohere with our moral

actions. On the other hand, what puzzles you has puzzled many souls. At the influx of grace the poor little evil soul will feel magnificent, infinite; we cannot understand why, all the more as it seems to us as if this feeling were dangerous, and has led to dangers in quotable instances. But, if we may conjecture, perhaps it is that the impact between God and the soul necessarily fills, as it were, the finite with the infinite. And He allows weak souls to feel this as they need much courage and buoyancy for the arduous work before them. You feel great because God is great, and happy because God is happy. Then, too, if we may impute almost impulsive action to the Most High, it is impossible not to think that the Father does not restrain his caresses when the soul comes to his arms. There is no conceivable accumulation of crime that He will not forgive."

There was silence. Horace shut his eyes, and the *curé* watched his wan face with an exquisite delicacy of compassion. Presently he opened them again.

"Why must I," he said almost to himself, "be so busy about judging and understanding? I almost doubt of Him because He is so good to me, whereas others——"

"How do you know," asked the *curé*, "that He is not equally good to them? What will the men you have known know of what is passing in your soul, and what do you know of what passes in theirs? You must not pry into His secrets about His other children."

Again they were silent, and presently the wind turned cold, and it was obvious that Horace must not stay.

The *curé* was about to help Horace out of his chair,

when he paused for a moment, and took off his hat and gave him his blessing. Then, looking straight into the great eyes that seemed to him beautiful in their wistful humility, he said firmly and with authority:

"Pax tecum."

XVII

CHILDREN, MAKE HASTE HOME

HORACE was exhausted by all he had gone through that day, and he slept well, but was too weak to get up until late in the following afternoon. When he went out he found that his legs bore him better than on the previous day, and without warning to Trix or Roberts, he walked off to the *curé's* house and climbed the flight of steps that led to the front door, and was shown by the servant into the dining-room. The *curé* was fetched, and found Horace looking out on to the sea that was in a dull mood, and almost plain, like a beauty who insists on sulking, even when it does not suit her.

Horace glanced up at the ruddy face, and with an appealing gesture apologised for not attempting to stand.

"Eh bien! comment ça va?" asked the old man.

"Peace down somewhere very deep, but troubles on the surface, M. le Curé," said Horace. "I want to go to confession, and yet——"

He paused. The *curé* had drawn up a chair, and the weak, watery eyes looked out to sea, and the brown, cracked lips of the sweet mouth puckered and then became smooth again as he waited.

"Can you understand that part of me is a Christian boy who seems to have gone to confession only a short time ago, but that under all my intense need for help and my real faith, I know that there is within me a

brain that has not been satisfied, has not seen it to be possible that Christianity can be justified to the intellect. For thirty years I have accepted the adverse conclusions of men of science. I wanted them to be adverse. My father-in-law always regretted those conclusions while he forced them on me, and for some time they did hurt acutely, but afterwards I wanted to be convinced by them. I wanted to laugh at the religion that clung to me when I wished to be rid of it. I have read German philosophy, destructive criticism. I am not a specialist in those subjects; but I have gone so far into them it seems impossible that these men can be mistaken. How can I be loyal to my God if I come to Him like this? How can I, sick unto death, make a deep intellectual inquiry into these things? It is impossible. Oh, my God, this cannot be a delusion, this enormous peace; but how can I keep it, how can I please Thee, how can I do penance if I am haunted by these thoughts?"

The *curé* looked out to sea where the pale setting sun was changing the shapes of the islands from what they had been in the morning. He was praying.

"Which authors have had most influence with you?" he said.

Horace mentioned three.

"Read some of the parts that are most familiar to you now, at once, not too hard so as to tire yourself, but see how they look to you now, how they square with your new knowledge, how they fit into the great facts of life. Approach them now from the premisses God has given you and see where what is true in them can be grafted on to your assured first principles."

"I see," said Horace. "You mean that the value of their evidence depends on their first principles, the

proportion of that evidence that matters to us is what squares with ours?"

"'I know Him in Whom I have believed,'" quoted the *curé*. "Go into it again under the light of His Countenance."

"But then," said Horace humbly, with a hungry look in his eyes, "I shall read them with a bias."

"Bon Dieu," said the old *curé*, taking a pinch of snuff, "and have your authors written those books without a bias? It is inhuman, impossible, not to have a bias. Look, my son, there is a venture in this business. See what you can make of the world with your hand in God's and then, if you love Him, you will make the venture of faith. From the first, from to-day, you must make it—you must make it by doing the things that will increase that bias of which you speak. You must come and sit in the church when you are too tired to kneel. You must purify yourself in the company of the Blessed Virgin, you must be patient in suffering, kind to those about you, you must make any sacrifice you see to be necessary. You must make all possible reparation to any whom you have injured. You have lived in sin: no little remedies will avail you. You must be purged with a strong purge. But, strange anomaly of the Christian life, you must remain in peace. Go, and do all this and read your infidel books, and come back to me in a week, or sooner, as you like."

"Thank you," said Horace.

That night he had the courage to write and tell Kate to destroy his play at once. She was mystified and aghast. She had known him have wild reactions, and disgusts with his work before now, but he had never yet gone so far as to wish to destroy it. This time he

had no one with him to give him confidence and courage in the black fit that followed on the strain of production. However, she locked the MS. into her despatch-box with a strange smile when she had finished reading his letter. The great point was that it was safe in her hands.

It was a week before the *curé* saw Horace, except in the distance in the church. Then he again presented himself at the presbytery.

"Yes," he said, almost at once. "I don't pretend to be able to tackle this science, but I feel that to me it is now beside the mark. I find (some people might say because I want to find it) enough of contradiction, of constant change, of fashions in thought, of a man's love of his own methods, whether they square with the facts or not, to make it impossible to pin one's soul to their conclusions. And much that is important can, I think, as you say, square with religious premisses. But, M. le Curé, that is not all. The real strength of these men lies in greater difficulties, in the miseries and anomalies of human nature. I look out into the world and how do I see the God Who is giving me light for myself? Is it not a scene of hideous contradiction where the wicked triumph and the weak are trampled under foot? It is life, pain, fraud, lies that give those men the force that affects us. The pharisaism, the cant——"

"Stop!" said the *curé*. "Mr. Blake, you must act now and at once. You must either turn away or you must bow to the insoluble. You must not stand as a critic in the face of creation. You must kneel at the foot of the Cross where hung your Creator. Come to confession now, at once."

A struggle passed over Horace's face; then he rose like a child. They went together to the old church, and Horace prepared himself while the *curé* said his Office. Then, as if it were no new thing, he went into the confessional, repeated the *Confiteor* as he had done as a child and told the story of his life. None of those who condemned him harshly afterwards judged him nearly as sternly as he judged himself. Often good, merciful people, in the years to come, spoke of him truly as a very bad man; men who were not over-strict said truly that he had reached the limit. But no one ever realised the truth of such judgments as he did himself. Even the queer, decadent, immoral set he had lived in did not attempt in their final verdict to whitewash him as they whitewash their favourites, but no word they ever spoke of him touched the depths of his own abasement. The horrible story was told with the simplicity and absence of comment that had been enjoined on the innocent boy at his first confession. No humiliation the world could have inflicted on him was as deep as the humiliation he inflicted on himself.

They came out, the old man and the middle-aged one, on both of whom Death had already set his marks. The old *curé* knelt before the Lady altar and cried. He almost thought he could hear the rejoicing of the angels as he had never heard them before.

Presently the *curé* touched the sick man on the shoulder.

"My son, you must rest. Go and rest and thank God."

In his inner consciousness at that moment Horace was kneeling by his sister Mary, and their mother knelt in front of them. Their mother turned round

and said: "Children, make haste home," and he realised that the *curé* was speaking to him.

Horace looked up and then took the old, red hand in his and kissed it. The expression of his face was infinitely humble, modest and tender. Death might have chosen that moment in mercy, but the life had to be finished that Horace had made for himself. The lesson was a far harder one than he could yet suppose to be possible, and he had to learn it bit by bit in long, slow moments, long, dragging hours.

After that the *curé* had to give him a still muscular arm until they neared the hotel and he was relived by the amazed and almost suspicious Roberts.

XVIII

YOU CAN HELP ME

MRS. BLAKE and Stephen Tempest were again alone in the smoking-room of the club in which she was staying. It was a dull room where in the afternoons women with white and grey and yellow and black hair played at bridge with a faint air of emancipation. Perhaps they felt themselves to be the heirs to all the ages in which women had been tormented and enslaved.

Kate Blake had no interest in their doings; she was too full of what she had in hand. She was glad that this room was so often empty in the mornings.

"Mr. Tempest," she said suddenly, "do you dislike being talked to as I talk to you? I mean, is the burden of confidence rather trying?"

"Not in the least, I assure you." He had not so far felt as if she had been at all confidential; he had only glimpsed under her reserve. But she was so uncommunicative with man or woman that she was astonished at the freedom with which she spoke to Stephen.

"It must seem strange that I am here as you know how ill Horace is."

"I am certain—" began Stephen.

Kate interrupted him.

"I have suffered before when he left me for other things—business or pleasure—but I never felt it as I

feel it now when he has left me to go away to suffer alone—perhaps to die."

She was leaning forward in a deep low leather armchair with her elbows on her knees. Looking straight in front of her she went on:

"I understand it; his illness has touched something in his brain. He has never had any control of his nerves, and now he wants to be away from me because he cannot bear to see in my face my belief that he is dying. If I were there he must face the things that have to be done, or he thinks so. Then he is worn out, shockingly tired, an infinitely acute sort of fatigue; he has played himself out, he has exploited himself for his work. And I have always helped him to work, in one sense I have not spared him. I knew it was best for him, Mr. Tempest, to develop the higher side of him. So you see I am, to his mind, a person to work with, not to rest with. I have had too much influence with him. I think he will need me before the end. Day and night I wait to be summoned and I don't think he can put me off much longer now. We are too close to each other in a way. Then, too, he will get to the time when he will want to think of the future, and what is to become of his work." She paused, and then added: "If he had had a less good nurse he must have needed me now."

Stephen looked at her in speechless sympathy.

"What does the doctor out there think of him?"

"He has no doctor out there. Sir Thomas Goodstone said that I need not insist on one. If Roberts, the trained nurse, is not satisfied as to what he ought to do he will wire to Sir Thomas, who will go out there at once."

"The strangest thing to me," Kate went on, "is

that he has had the strength to work, and work hard. I think he must have needed me then. He has"—she looked as if she were imparting a secret of world-wide importance—"he has finished his play."

"Has he really?" cried Stephen eagerly.

Mrs. Blake hesitated for a moment.

"I don't think I ought to talk of it now."

"What amazing pluck!" said Stephen.

"Yes," said Kate proudly, "he was aching for rest, then he had a bad attack of pain; when that passed off he wrote in a sudden flare of energy for three days and most of the three nights. I am not sure if it is the greatest thing he has done, but I think so. Mr. Tempest, did I hear you say last night that you were going abroad?"

"Yes, for two or three weeks. I have not yet decided where to go, but the man I devil for is ill and I have an article to write and I want quiet."

"I wonder if you would go to Brittany? It is very beautiful. I want you to know my husband. I want a friend to tell me how he seems. I want a report I can trust. I have known you such a short time that you must think this very strange of me, but I believe that you are just the one person who can help me."

"Of course I will," said Stephen eagerly. "It will be a privilege I shall be proud of." He spoke quickly because his heart sank at the idea. Would Blake not think it an abominable intrusion for this strange young man to invade his privacy?

Kate detected his feeling.

"I don't mean that it should be more than that you should choose that wonderful coast for your change. You will find out at once whether he likes

to have visits from you and if he does *not* you will have just the same time abroad for your work as you expected to have. Will you trust me that I am right? I have reasons I can't explain."

"I will do just as you tell me," said Stephen, with convincing energy. "And," he went on with a smile, "am I to take a letter of introduction?"

"I will write to Trix and tell her to find out if her father would like to see you. Then they will be prepared when you call."

Then they talked again of the play and presently Stephen went away to his own club to consult Baedeker as to a good hotel in the neighbourhood of St. Jean des Pluies.

Kate was right in her choice. If she had sent an old friend Horace must have seen him, even if it were against his will. This young man would not appear in the light of an obligation, probably he would be a distraction. But the main object in her mind was that a possible future biographer should know Horace in the flesh—what flesh and blood and bones were left of him. Otherwise how would he ever present him to the world?

Stephen, of course, had not the faintest suspicion of what was passing in her mind, or he would have felt it almost impossible to do her bidding.



XIX

THE WEAKNESS OF FAME

THE afternoon post had brought quite a mass of letters and papers. Horace, who was lying in the garden, took them up eagerly, and for some minutes he quite enjoyed them. Trix came out and he made her read aloud a short article on his own work which Kate had forwarded.

When she finished he seemed to have become absent-minded.

"Strange, strange," he thought, "how far away it sounds. No one about me here realises me in that way. Would M. le Curé be at all interested in my position in the world over there? His Théodore Botrel is probably a far greater man in his eyes. That is the real weakness of fame—that we cannot realise it ourselves unless those near us reflect it. A small, kind thing near us makes far more happiness than the great thing that is not brought home to us. Trix, what big eyes you have!"

"The better to see that you are tired, father!"

"Tired out," said Horace, "infinitely tired."

"Can I do anything, father?"

"You can do a great deal."

"What? do tell me."

"Just sit there and be my rest. 'Du bist die Ruhe.' I have never seen anyone so restful except Mary."

"Aunt Mary?"

"Yes, Aunt Mary, you very young thing. She had your features, your hair, but"—he gave a sharp sigh—"she had other things you have not got."

"You mean that she was beautiful?"

"No, Trix; I don't mean that."

He was silent, watching her with a look of pain in his eyes.

"I am not your 'Ruhe' now, father, am I?"

Blake sighed again.

"Go along, get away!" he cried with one of his sweetest smiles. "You must walk, run. Is there no girl here you could play tennis with?"

"I like the sea-coast best."

"Don't tumble over the cliffs, for my sake."

Trix went in to the hotel to fetch her hat, but was back again in a moment. She spoke in a low voice.

"I have just heard a visitor asking for you; it must be that Mr. Tempest mother wrote about."

Trix was inclined to resent this young man being sent to see them. It seemed to her that her mother was to blame for letting him disturb them like this. Her father might not like to refuse to see him as he had refused to see the newspaper-man. The short note to Trix had said so little; it had been all about this stranger, and she had been hurt at no more sympathy being shown to herself. It was natural that the letters had hitherto been written to her father, but when one came to herself she thought there would have been some sympathy with the anxieties of her position as the only woman with him.

Roberts brought out Stephen's card to Miss Blake. He had written on it the name of an hotel at the neighbouring town.

"There 's no need to see him to-day, father," was her immediate comment. "Mother warned him that you might not be well enough."

"Oh, yes," said Horace. "I know that, but I think he might be amusing. Bring him here, Roberts, and say we 'll have tea out here, will you?"

A man stretched out on a *chaise longue*, covered with a rug, and standing behind him a tall young girl, became visible to Stephen as he followed Roberts round a belt of evergreens. He had to shake hands before he could see them in focus at all.

He had at once an impression of the man's great, light eyes and charming smile, and of a rather serious, almost cross look on the girl's pretty face.

"You have been meeting Mrs. Blake in London," said Horace. "What has brought you out here?"

"I had some work to do and I wanted sea air and a quiet place."

"It 's a capital place for work or for rest," said Horace cheerfully. "I hope your hotel pleases you as much as this one pleases us. Here comes tea."

As he turned his head away for a moment Stephen had the impression that he was in pain. Trix looked at her father with a glance of the deepest sympathy, and what had been pretty in her young face before, became beautiful.

They were in a moment chatting about the hotel servants, and Petit-bon and his exactions.

"I believe father pays twice as much for his boat as anybody else pays."

"We pay for his conversation, Trix; you must pay for your amusements. Besides, does he not sing us the songs of Botrel which you delight in?"

"Mr. Tempest has not so much as heard of Botrel—

as people here have not heard of Horace Blake," Trix said laughingly to her father.

"By the way, did my wife tell you if there are still full houses for *False Measures?*"

"Crowded, I know," said Stephen Tempest; "and very good audiences, not only laughing where you have plainly ordered them to do so, but entering into the lights and shades of your meaning. At least," he added, diffidently, "what I believe to be your meaning. I have been ten times myself."

"And I have never seen one of father's plays, or even read them," cried Trix, from whose face the symptoms of annoyance had vanished very easily.

"And you are almost eighteen," said Horace quickly. "No, I don't want you to read them before you see them, and I don't want you to see them until —" He hesitated.

"Until I am fifty," said Trix, and the two men laughed.

There was very little said that was not of the most ordinary kind of chit-chat. Stephen got the impression that Horace treated his daughter with an almost old-fashioned care, and as the acquaintance ripened, he became sure that he was right. The father was ultra careful as to what was spoken of before her. Their mutual devotion touched him from the first.

That first evening he stayed about an hour, but he was asked to come again soon by both father and daughter.

Except for the passing impression of suffering, Stephen had seen nothing that was not peaceful or happy. He was drawn to Blake in a way that astonished him. There was something of wonderful patience in the great luminous eyes, of subtle meaning

tempered with sweetness in the large, irregular mouth. The next time he came, Blake was again in the garden. After a few minutes' talk he said:

"I wish you would take her out for a row or a walk. She ties herself to the leg of this chair, and it 's not good for her."

Stephen saw that something had passed between them on the subject before he came, and that Trix had had her orders. As he followed her out by the gate that led down to the sea, a tall old priest came towards them. Trix gave him a friendly nod, which the old man returned by a dignified waving of his hat.

"It is the land of bows," said Stephen, "but I 've seen few as good as that of that ruddy old personage."

"He is a dear old man," said Trix. "I 'm afraid with all that ruddy look he is very ill. He suffers a great deal, the sacristan tells me. Oh, she is such a funny little old woman, the sacristan—half a one, she says, because her sister is dead. She will declare that I 'm a Protestant and I tell her I 'm nothing, and she says that 's nonsense. We have such fights. You should see the airs she gives herself when she takes the *sous* for the chairs. The other night she tapped father on the shoulder as if he were a naughty schoolboy. But she tells me that father is a saint."

Stephen repressed a laugh of undue vigour into a merry one.

"Well, I 'm not sure she is not right, after all," said Trix aggressively. "I don't know much about saints, but if to be amazingly patient and unselfish and always thinking of other people before yourself is to be like a saint, then father is like a saint."

"It seems to me an uncommonly good description of one," said Stephen.

Trix was so full of her subject that it had overflowed almost unconsciously. She pulled herself up a little.

"Did you ever see a coast with such wonderful colouring?" she asked.

"It is glorious," said Tempest, turning towards her as she looked out to sea. She, too, had light in her eyes, but they were darker than her father's; she had, too, his mobile lips and delicate chin. If there was an element of weakness in Blake's face he could not tell if there were the same element in Trix; in her it might be only gentleness. "Not the faintest look of her mother," he concluded.

They climbed over rocks and visited a cave where a famous royalist had spent three months in hiding. Trix became still younger in his eyes as she grew excited, with the wind in her face and the water at her feet. She showed him her favourite little bay where the sand seldom had a footmark to mar its exquisite smoothness, and rocks lay like dark animals at rest until the cruel sea came to play with them before they were swallowed up. They stood on the rocks until they had to make wide jumps to get back to the dry sand.

She took him back to the *chaise longue* to say goodbye. Horace looked ghastly as they found him with his eyes shut. Tempest, glancing at Trix, saw that she was not startled or frightened by a look in the face that appalled him.

"Run in and change for dinner, child," said Blake, a great light coming into his face as his eyes opened upon her. And then, when she had gone, he turned to the visitor.

"I wanted to thank you. She has so little fun.

You have done just what I wished to-day. Can you come again soon?"

"Curious enough are my relations with the family of Blake," Tempest murmured to himself as he walked quickly down the high road. "I met Mrs. Blake only the other day, and I have come to Brittany by her orders to see after her husband. I saw Blake for the first time two days ago, and I go out by his orders to amuse his daughter, who confides in me that Horace Blake is a saint!" He laughed a little, but it was extremely touching all the same.

"What an astonishing person he is," thought Tempest. "Is n't there something of the savage latent in him after all—a savage who is under some strange influence?"



XX

THE SEVEN DEVILS

STEPHEN was more than willing to do Blake's behest and to undertake to amuse his daughter. He became interested in what he understood to have been her strange education. She had never been to school, never had a governess, hardly ever talked with other girls. Why had she been so isolated? He gathered that her aunt's home had been near a large village where religion made a great part of the interest of daily life. Probably her absence of creed had isolated her. But why had she not lived with her parents? Trix's present feelings towards her father evidently coloured the retrospect, but Stephen could not make out that she had been with him more than occasionally. The child had no notion how clearly she betrayed that she was now bitterly hurt by her mother, and it seemed to him that the feeling must have been of long, if unconscious growth. Poor Mrs. Blake! Had she sacrificed the child for the sake of the husband, only to find at the very end that he would rather be without her—that he would rather have the child with him than herself?

Kate seemed a tragic figure in the background of this loving duet between the father and daughter. There was something unusual in Horace's attitude towards his daughter, there was no sense of authority in it, but a tender, surprised gratitude, and at moments almost a painful look of appeal and humility.

Stephen knew little of Blake's reputation as a man—in fact until lately even the outward semblance of Horace's personality was not generally known. Kate had realised that to Stephen, Blake was simply the author of *False Measures* and its predecessors. But there was enough in those plays—interpret them as you liked—to make this invalid with his restrained talk and his ethereal smile sufficiently surprising. Even on the most idealised view the Blake plays could hardly have been written by a sacristan's saint. Kate could have told him that Blake had always had an exquisite smile at his command, but there was something in it now at once aloof and piteous in its patience. Stephen had, so far, found in him neither the daring wit nor the strong blows of the Iconoclast. He could not analyse the charm of the personality or the sense of peace and pleasant things that were in the atmosphere while he and Trix and Stephen chatted on about the coast and the people and the books they loved, as if life were made up of what was exquisite, familiar, and intimate.

One day when the two men sat outside after *déjeuner* and Trix had gone off with the manageress of the hotel to see the Fair, Stephen got a far less happy impression. They talked of the stage, and presently Horace fell into anecdotes that fairly made Tempest stare. Then, quite suddenly, he stopped short and was perfectly silent. Stephen, turning round, saw a look of anguish on his face, and thought he was in pain.

"I intended," he said suddenly, "never to talk like that again. I thought I never should, but at the slightest opening I fell into it." He paused again, and then changed the subject.

"Did my wife tell you that I had sent her the last act of my play?"

"Yes, she did; in confidence."

"I wonder where she burnt it," said Horace. "It was a large bit to burn on a hot day."

"Burnt it?" cried Stephen.

"Yes, I told her to burn it. It had to be done, Tempest, but I 'm afraid it will have tried her. If she said nothing about that she can't have had my letter with its annoying announcement when you saw her."

Tempest was too much amazed to be able to talk easily on any other subject. At last he went back to it. "I hope you won't think me impertinent, but I am aghast. Mrs. Blake was inclined to think that it is the best thing you have done."

"Did she say that?" asked Horace eagerly. "I was afraid that all the praise in her letters was just to please me."

"I don't believe," said Stephen slowly, "that it is burnt. Why, good heavens! it 's impossible. Have you no copy?"

"No," said Horace. "Let us leave it alone, I can't go back on it."

"I don't believe she has destroyed it or that she will destroy it," said Stephen doggedly.

A curious look, almost a sly look, came into Horace's face.

"I have told her to," he said, and Stephen thought at once that Blake hoped it might not be destroyed. After that he became restless.

"A beastly wind. I 'm getting sick of this climate. I believe I 've caught cold. Where 's Trix? Oh, never mind. Yes, thank you, I am told I am better; but the worst of having a disease that none of these

men understands is that no one really knows when I am better or worse. I believe I am considered very interesting in the London hospitals. I wish I could take a scientific interest in my damned body myself. I saw the men's eyes glistening with enjoyment at their last consultation. They hung me up stark-naked while they photographed my inside for a mortal hour, and one of them said that the results were beautiful. If I 'd been an Eastern potentate I 'd have had that scoundrel flayed alive. Would n't I have enjoyed it." He looked cruel in his laughter. "There 's a picture in Bruges of an unjust judge being flayed alive, the skin drawn off. Bah! it 's a marvellous bit of realism, and the just judge looking on and enjoying it. That 's how the good enjoyed themselves in the Middle Ages."

"Do you suppose they felt things as acutely as we do now?"

"I don't know," said Horace. "Who ever knows? How do you know what I 'm feeling now? It 's just coming on again; talk of something else." He realised himself on his elbow. "Ah, forgive me, Tempest," he said suddenly; "bear with a tortured beast," and he added under his breath, "who thoroughly deserves it. Would you be kind and fetch Roberts, and there 's the child coming back, if you have time to spare would you take her out somewhere? Don't tell her," he groaned, "that I 'm a bit bad."

Tempest obediently started off, first to summon Roberts and then to intercept Trix.

Horace soon felt that the worst pain had subsided, but a dull ache was left. Roberts knew that he was in a black mood.

"He 's keeping the curses in by main force," he

said to himself. The effect of irritability was so intense that it told on the man-nurse as a sirocco tells on the nerves in Florence. He exercised self-restraint so obviously as to exasperate Horace. Five different positions were tried, cushions heaped up, then no cushions at all; a cigar lit and thrown away, then the *chaise longue* was to be moved out of the wind, and each spot chosen proved to have a draught of its own. Two girls came out of the hotel and sat near, and Horace stared at them until they moved on, trying not to look annoyed. Then an old woman came out with her bath-towels and said cheerfully that she was going for a dip. Horace felt a repulsion for old and ugly women that amounted to hatred. And it was not tactful to blare her strength, the fact that she could bathe in that wind, to the poor wreck before her.

Presently the *curé* came through the little iron gate among the shrubs.

"Curse it! leave it where it is," muttered Horace, and Roberts let go the *chaise longue* with the attenuated form in it and fetched a chair for the visitor.

"Comment ça va ce matin?" said the old man as he sat down, filling the garden chair. The fine shoulders and ruddy face looked healthy to the untrained eye, but Roberts detected other symptoms.

"It goes very badly," said Horace gently. "Soul and body—I am disposed to think that the seven devils have arrived." He gave a sad, sweet smile.

"They were to be expected," said the old man gently.

"I will tell you," said Horace, "what they are talking about. One says, 'A hopelessly rotten lot—threw over his last grace years ago; we need n't trouble, we 're sure of him.' Number Two says:

'Well, anyhow, the evil he has done will live after him.' Number Three says: 'He does n't really believe it all.' Number Four says: 'So he will get no good by worrying himself and us.' Number Five says: 'The only thing he sold his soul for was fame, and he is throwing that away at the end.' Number Six says: 'And he is depriving his wife, after he has treated her abominably, of just what she cares for most.' Number Seven says: 'She 's not such a fool as to burn the play; he has only to let it alone; that 's the best way to put it to him.' Then all seven have a sort of quadrille, the old previous devil joining in to make eight, and think what fun they will get out of that play after all."

"And you," said the *curé*, taking a pinch of snuff, "repeat the 'Hail, Mary!' and whisht!"—he gave his handkerchief a switch—"off they go." He pointed downwards. "Ite inferius," he concluded, as if he saw the black things under Horace's chair.

Horace smiled affectionately. "But I 've made them say the truth as it came more politely out of their black lips."

"No, not the truth," said the old man very softly, "not the truth. But now about this play; is it really impossible?"

"Quite," said Horace.

"Could I understand it if I read it?"

Horace tried to hide his amusement.

"I fear not; I almost hope not," he said.

"May I try?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Horace.

"What does your wife think of it?"

"She thinks it the best thing I have done yet."

"Then it can't be so very bad."

Horace was silent. It came home to him with great force that he could not conceive Kate sticking at anything he could write.

"Look, mon père," he said, with a certain eager loyalty to Kate, "Madame was brought up without religion; she is pure to the core, but I—I have given her a long training in these matters. I have taken off the keen edge of her susceptibilities. I have taught her to put art before everything. I have bruised out of her the pride that other women have in their home-life; she has forgiven me and despised me, and found comfort and pride in my success. I think by now she might sacrifice anything to my success. When I think, M. le Curé, of the noble, simple life she led with her father, and what I have dragged her through, I don't know whether I love her or hate her."

He covered his face with his hands.

"The only thing," he went on presently, "that I can do for her is to give her all the fame, all the comfort, all the rest, I can. And now—" he stopped. "Then when she finds out what has happened here it will make her far more bitter against religion if she has been made to burn the play. I feel sure she has not done it. During the last few days I have begun to hope—I know it is wrong—but to hope that it is not burnt after all. Can I leave it so?"

They were both silent. Then Horace looked up with a fresh light in his eyes.

"*I* am going to answer," he said, "not you. I believe you did send those seven devils down there." He pointed under the chair. "Help me to make sure of this thing being destroyed without hurting my wife more than I can help."

"I don't want this to trouble you," said the *curé*.

"Write to her now to ask if she has done it or not, and if she has not done it, then you can insist if necessary. But perhaps it is already done."

Horace took up his writing-case instantly, and wrote an affectionate line to his wife. He filled it out by warm words of Stephen Tempest.

"You are suffering to-day," said the old man.

"I am no good," said Horace. "I had one thing to sacrifice, and I have not done that with decent grace."

"God does not expect the most beautiful manners from us."

"I keep," said Horace, "thinking of one horror after another, sins I forgot to mention, any one of which would have seemed a dark blot on his past to almost any man."

"Don't compare yourself with any man. Only compare yourself with God," said the *curé*, "and you will soon think of Him and not of yourself."

"I meant to ask to go to Holy Communion to-morrow, but I 'm not fit to go."

"You 'll never be fit."

"You mean that I am to go to-morrow."

"You ought to. Ah, my son! I know it goes hard now. You were dazzled by the first light. It was bright and distinct; now you see more clearly. Just leave all you can to God; be as childlike as you can. Pray and trust."

Horace looked at him, and to the *curé* that look recalled the image of the cripple by the waters of Siloam looking at Christ.

"The Divine Potter is stern in moulding this clay, he thought; "but it is most wonderful, this work of the Most High." Nothing to the old man was more

satisfactory than the efforts Horace had made—efforts that had often left him terribly exhausted—to repair the evils he had done in the past. Many hours a day he had dragged wearily through the often rather hopeless correspondence that this involved.

They were silent together as only friends can be.

"Poor child!" murmured Horace at length.

"A good child," said the *curé*.

"Poor little girl!" said her father.

"We must pray for a good marriage."

"In England it is all left to chance."

"Or to love," said the old man.

"That 's the ideal," said Horace, "to which men are content to chance their daughters. It would be more paternal to leave them a *dot*. I can only trust Trix to the generosity of my wife."

"That is not likely to fail now," said the *curé*.

Then there came through the gate the said Trix and Stephen Tempest. It was at that moment that it flashed into Horace's mind that they looked uncommonly well together, those tall, straight, active young people. His imagination, always inflammable, caught at the idea. He made a great effort to efface the impression of his irritability that afternoon and exerted all his charm, talking brightly with the three sitting near him.

"Of course that 's it," said Stephen to himself that night. "Horace Blake has become a Roman Catholic —the old *curé* has got hold of him. Good heavens!" Stephen did not like the idea one bit. The sacristan had called Horace a saint; he had been going to the church; he had grown amazingly patient; he pulled himself up in his talk; finally, he had told his wife to burn his last work of genius—perhaps his greatest

work of all. Stephen's cultured bias was on the religious side in life. He was disillusioned, like so many of his generation, with materialism; he felt the claims of a more human instinctive view of life; he was attracted to the literary school in France that believed in family ties and racial traditions as the safest and the best hope for a country. He rather dreaded the desolate waste of arid speculation, and thought he could tread in the worn paths of human thought without too much analysis. What had satisfied his forefathers would surely serve for his own needs. His admiration for Horace's work was æsthetic, but he cared so much for his brilliant dramatisation that he wanted, if he could, as he had said, to discover that Blake was only destroying modern evils before reconstructing. All this was more latent than explicit in a mind that had plenty of daily occupation without troubling itself over metaphysics or theology. But there were old Protestant strains in Stephen's blood, and there was the fastidiousness of culture, and he was startled, as many more religious men may be, at the knocking up, as it were, against the strange spiritual. To see human nature on the anvil and supernatural forces at work on it is a trial. Stephen disliked it very much. Again he wished that he had never met Mrs. Blake, and, above all, that she had never sent him on such a voyage of inquiry. He had discovered without prying and unwillingly—most unwillingly—what she would mind infinitely.

And Trix! What did that dear child think of all this, think of this old soft-toned *curé*, with the kind eyes, who would have been so perfectly in his place by the bedside of a dying fisherman, where his minis-

trations would have been exquisite and appropriate? Why should he go out of his sphere to play the inquisitor and make an *auto da fé* of Blake's greatest work?



XXI

A FRIEND AT THE LAST STATION

NEXT morning when Stephen Tempest walked over to St. Jean des Pluies he met Trix, paddling on the sands.

"Father would make me come out," she said. "Will you paddle or talk for a bit? Father said he would read till *déjeuner*."

"Can't we do both?" he asked.

Trix shook her head gravely, and then smiled as a wave rippled over her white feet. She came out of the water and sat down on a rock and slipped on her sandals.

"Now I 'll walk on the wet side, as I have no stockings, and you shall go on the dry. I want to talk about father."

She was even less self-conscious than usual. Her best hat made her think of her appearance, but in a cotton blouse, a short serge skirt, and no hat, what was there to think about?

"A most astounding thing has happened," said Trix very gravely, "and I think I must speak to some one. I knew he liked going to the church here, and I suppose I ought to have understood, but I did n't. Father has become a Roman Catholic! I saw him receive the Communion this morning."

"I 'm not astonished," said Stephen. "I thought he was going that way."

"And you know it 's really nonsense," said Trix.

"It may not be nonsense for the Bretons," said Stephen; "but it 's preposterous for your father!"

Trix did not attempt to analyse this remark.

"It 's a comfort to have a friend to speak to," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Father is ever so much happier to-day, but it can't be any good to be happy through nonsense, can it?"

"I am sorry for you about it," said Stephen; "but then I am unhappy about you altogether, Miss Blake. Why does he not let your mother come?"

"Does mother want to come?" cried Trix.

"She is breaking her heart at being kept away. I wonder if that old priest does not want her to come. The very best of them—and splendid old fellows they often are—lose their heads in the excitement of getting a convert. You see it covers up all their own little peccadilloes."

Trix stopped short and an anxious frown puckered her white forehead.

"Am I horribly selfish? I 'm not sure if I really do want mother to come. I should not be allowed to do a thing for father if she came. After all, I believe it 's just the same with many mothers and daughters."

"Not just like this," thought Stephen.

"Don't tell mother what I have told you." Then she stopped. "No, that 's not fair. It can't be a secret, can it? And yet, what do you think? Is it fair to him to tell?"

"He has not told you not to tell. And, considering his state of health, I think she *ought* to be told."

"Very well," said Trix slowly, "you don't think his mind is failing, do you?"

"Not by anything he says, but of course there may be weakness on some points."

Then suddenly she turned towards him with her eyes brimming with tears. "Tell me the truth; does this illness mean that he must die? Mother told me nothing."

"The doctors confess that they don't understand the illness, but they do think in the London hospitals that it is incurable."

"Just when I 've learnt to know him and to live for him," she said, looking out to sea and trying to be brave with a child's courage.

"Look Trix," he said, using her name unconsciously, "I had an idea just now that may have something in it. I want to find out what is the greatest opinion in Paris on this disease. Our men are behind theirs in diagnosis, though they are ahead of them in surgery. We 'll get a Paris man to come down here if he is not fit to go to Paris."

Trix's eyes lit up. She sprang at hope with the fearlessness of inexperience.

"Oh yes, yes!" she said. "I am sure he has the greatest contempt for all the big men he saw in London. You could n't come back at the same time, could you?"

"I don't see how I can, but I 'll try to," said Stephen. They stood still for a moment.

"I would do anything to help," he said very gently.

Trix did not speak, and they walked back together in silence, though there was much to say.

Horace lying in the garden saw them before they saw him. That silence seemed to his imagination the sign he was vouchsafed in the shadows from those two young souls walking upright and strong in the sunshine. He also saw that they did not themselves understand its meaning.

It was Stephen's last evening in Brittany. It had been a good day for Horace and he was able to get down to the shore by the rock stairway leaning on Stephen's arm. At the water's edge they were very near the sunset and full of peace. Blake was silent for the most part, with his mobile face at rest, while the sunset glory was reflected in the light of his large eyes. Stephen had never felt such close intimacy with any two human beings before, at least since he was a grown man. They touched him infinitely, those two, in their devotion to each other, and somehow in that short hour he seemed absolutely joined with them. Then the good moment went. A little cold draught of air came across the water; a great cloud turned leaden coloured and looked angry. Blake gave an almost imperceptible shiver; it was hard work getting him up the rock stairway. Stephen and Trix were afraid that they had made a mistake. Horace was out of breath when they got him in. As he sank back on the sofa in his room he said to Stephen:

"It was glorious—can't talk any more—I 'm afraid. Did n't think I should get a friend at the last station. You 'll see my wife. Tell her everything about me."

He laid stress on the "everything," and he looked up at Stephen with more meaning in his eyes than the young man could decipher.

Trix came down-stairs with Stephen. They spoke almost as conspirators.

"You 'll try at once to find out about the Paris doctors?"

"I shall go to Paris if necessary."

"Oh, you are good to us. But he is rather wonderful, is n't he?"

"Very wonderful," said Stephen fervently.

"I am so glad you came," said Trix, "you have really helped him. He likes you enormously. Of course if mother were better for him than I can be I should want her to come. She is splendid at nursing, you know. I hope I have n't said anything—anything unkind about her, as if we did n't get on?"

"Oh, no," said Stephen mendaciously.

"Do you think," said Trix, satisfied on that score and going on to another question, "that people will think much less of father when they find out that he has become a Roman Catholic?"

What people thought of Blake was what she had been taught to consider as paramount.

"No," said Stephen promptly. "They will think that he was ill and that the priests got hold of him."

"But that will seem so weak."

"Men as ill as he is are allowed to be weak."

"It would be weaker still to go back upon it?"

"I suppose so," said Stephen.

"There 's a great deal that 's beautiful about it," said Trix. "I almost wish at moments that I did n't know it was nonsense."

Trix *knowing* it was nonsense appealed faintly to Stephen's sense of humour. He looked at her and wondered if that conviction of its all being nonsense would hold out under what might prove overwhelming forces. He doubted it. Trix was clever, he believed very clever, but undeveloped. It seemed to him that her anti-religious theories, her scientific conclusions, had all been got by rote, taken on authority. The mind had not passed that simply receptive stage as yet. Her feelings had been of much quicker growth, and mind and heart had not been brought together.

"Don't fall into it yourself," he said lightly, but with intention.

Trix did not resent this. She shook her head.

"Isn't it strange," she said suddenly, "that a month ago I had never heard of you? I must say 'good-bye,' now, Mr. Tempest."



XXII

IS THE PLAY BURNED?

STEPHEN was waiting in the little ante-room of Mrs. Blake's club while kindly alert club servants fetched and carried, and brought in visitors and called members to the telephone, and looked as if they had great hopes of pulling this particular set of ladies safely through their complicated engagements for yet another day. Meanwhile he saw a different scene much more clearly than the one before his eyes. In his inner vision he was still on the sands of the many-coloured Breton coast. He went over the days he had spent there in his mind as he waited for Mrs. Blake.

"I wonder if I shall recognise any likeness to Trix when I see her mother again," he said to himself at length.

A tall woman came into the room and started.

"If I had known you were here I should have hurried back. Mr. Tempest, shall we go for a walk? it is so fine; would you mind?"

"It 's just what I should like," said Stephen.

He felt at once how much easier it would be to talk out walking than sitting here. They went by the Tube at Kate's suggestion to Hampstead Heath, where the may was in flower and the scenic landscape was very rich and beautiful.

"I hate Hampstead—we lived here years ago," said Mrs. Blake, "and my admiration is reluctant, but I do admire. Now please tell me all you can."

But it was a question, not a narrative, that burst from Stephen's lips.

"Have you burnt the play?"

Mrs. Blake looked at him severely.

"I am going to trust you," she said. "I have not destroyed the play, but——" She paused.

"I am relieved," said Tempest. "He gave me an awful shock. I put such confidence in you that I felt sure you had not done it. And I hope I did no harm. In my astonishment I lost my head, and said at once that I was sure you would not burn it, and he——"

Stephen hesitated.

"And he?" repeated Mrs. Blake anxiously.

"I think," said Stephen, turning to her, smiling, "I think he was glad, though he would not say so."

"Did you," said Kate unflinchingly, "see any signs of his mind being affected?"

How different was the question on her lips, from a woman who had lived so much, to the same question trilled out by Trix only waiting to be reassured!

"Not a symptom." But something in his voice did not satisfy Mrs. Blake. Stephen felt oppressed by this strong, anxious woman walking wearily and yet hurriedly by his side.

Then in a voice that trembled she said:

"There 's no religious nonsense in this, is there?"

"Yes," said Stephen, "that is it. He has become a Roman Catholic."

He turned towards her in acute sympathy, and he saw on her face that this was the unbearable thing, and the thing that she had dreaded.

"Ah! they 've got him," she said. "Do you mind sitting on this bench?"

He saw that she was trembling. She sat down, and a moment later she burst out:

"Ah, Mr. Tempest, is it not hard? At least, I thought he would live and die as a real thinker, leave a great name, be among the intellectual giants of our time. I thought he had intellectual truth at any rate, and that he would die with some dignity. He saw my father die, calm, undisturbed." And to herself she thought: "His life has been too bad for him to end it with any dignity; that is the moral; that is what all men of judgment will say of him."

She strove for calmness, but her voice was full of bitterness.

"He was born and bred a Catholic," she said. "It was my father who taught him to think. He had far too much mind not to respond to my father. The year we married his only sister went to be a Carmelite. He felt she had been caught and fascinated. He was repelled. Ah! how repellent he has made it all to me for years!"

She checked the flow of words. She had never complained before, why should she break down now and betray herself and him to this new friend? "It is such a defeat," she said to herself. "I have striven so hard to keep Horace up, to keep him afloat at all, and now I am defeated."

"I suppose," she went on, "that he is a dying saint, or he would not have made the sacrifice, the sin-offering of a burnt play. Did they say that Monsieur was a saint?" She gave a sad and angry laugh.

"Only the old sacristan said so—at least, so Miss Blake told me."

"Horace Blake has become a sacristan's saint! Is n't it humorous?"

"It is ironic," said Stephen. "He was so good to me. I am absolutely devoted to him. I can't thank you enough for sending me out there. His patience is amazing, his gentleness, the care he takes of his daughter."

"Yes, a saint," murmured Kate.

"Don't," cried Stephen, "don't Mrs. Blake; it hurts me and it hurts you far more."

"Then you are glad that the priests have caught him?"

"No, indeed; nor is Miss Blake. But I do feel it is different now I know that he was born and bred in their creed. I am very sorry, but it is more natural, less painful. You know that one cannot but see that it is a real help to simple people who have it in their blood and in their bones as those Breton peasants have."

"Lies cannot really bring comfort," said Kate, and Stephen felt as if he were being scolded. "A religion can't be true for some people and good for some people if it is intrinsically false."

She was silent for a moment after that, and then said quickly:

"Did he tell you this himself?"

"No, Miss Blake told me that he had been to Communion in the Roman Church that morning. He had not spoken to her about it. I could not see that he had tried to influence her in any way."

He wished to soothe the mother's fears, but she took no notice.

"It has not been in any French paper yet," she said. "I have an excellent French newsagent. But the priests are sure to trumpet it all over the place. Did you hear it spoken of there?"

"Oh, no; nobody there knew anything about Mr. Blake. He said himself that it brought home to him the limits of his fame."

"Well, I must think," said Mrs. Blake, wearily rising from her seat. "Mr. Tempest, we won't speak of this at all, except to each other."

"Certainly not."

"I wonder if he meant me to know?"

"I thought so, because he asked me to tell you everything about him, and he laid stress on the 'everything,' and his look was very significant."

"He had not the courage to tell me himself," was Kate's unspoken comment.

As they walked back to the Tube station, Stephen told her that he had been to Paris before coming home, and why he had been there. Kate shook her head.

"It 's no good," she said; "they will only torture him for nothing."

"But ought it not to be tried?" He detailed all he had heard at the great hospital he had visited. "They affirm that Dr. Saumur has made cures at the most advanced stages."

"I was so strongly advised by four doctors to leave him alone," said Kate in a suffering voice. "But, of course, if there is the remotest chance we must try it. It was astonishingly good of you to take so much trouble."

"I would take a thousand times more if it could be of the least use!" exclaimed Stephen.

"I think in that case I should have to insist on going to him—and perhaps——"

She stopped. They had reached the Tube station and they hardly spoke a dozen words afterwards, but he was to come to the club next day.

To reopen it again! All thought of the religious question was lost in that; to reopen the question of the horrible examinations to excite his imagination with false hopes, and yet, if they were not false?—if he were to rise up again and throw off sickness and all its weakness, what might he not do before he had to die? What might he not leave behind him?

By the next morning she was keenly, intensely bent on the scheme of the Paris doctor. She was determined to go to Paris at once and tell the story of the illness to Dr. Saumur.

That night she started. Before leaving she put a copy of the play in the safe at their bank. Before she saw Stephen she had written to Horace to say that the MS. was destroyed, and it *was* destroyed. It had not taken too long to copy that last act. A typist she could trust had worked hard, and she herself had worked harder. The two first acts of the play had been copied before the last act reached London.

XXIII

TO PROPOSE TO GO AND TO BE TOLD NOT TO

DR. SAUMUR, the great Paris specialist, did seem to Kate to throw new light on the possibilities of recovery, although he did not say that he felt the least hope himself. She spoke on Dr. Saumur's telephone in English to Roberts, asking questions for the great man; at the same time, she warned Roberts to keep the matter to himself. They were different questions from any that had been asked before, and that in itself seemed to have a hopeful significance.

But as she walked about Paris in the afternoon trying to distract her mind and to tire her body so as to get to sleep at night, she wondered if this different method of attacking the disease was much more than a futile effort. New names, perhaps, for the same things, and a Sherlock-Holmes-like attention to a different class of detail, was it any good? The doctor was to let her know in twenty-four hours whether, after a careful study of his notes on the case, he thought there was any use at all in disturbing Horace by fresh examinations which he owned must give him more pain. Meanwhile Kate tried in vain to take an interest in Paris; and her thoughts flew back to the days when her father had brought Anne and herself to see Paris for the first time—only its great historic sights, for it never occurred to the philosopher that Kate and Anne might have wished to see the shops as well, and the girls had never suggested such a thing.

Standing under the dome of the Invalides, Kate's heart beat for a moment with a remembrance of the wild excitement of her girlhood. Napoleon had been her first hero. In her teens she had been out to find a demi-god, and she had not been anxious lest the demi-god should prove to have had low elements in his composition. She stood at the rail now, looking down on the great tomb, and thinking as the minutes went by more of her past self than of anything else. "We were not brought up to understand life," she thought. "It 's not good to stand apart as we did; it only makes more suffering in the long run."

As she turned away she could not keep from the thought that tried her so terribly. If she wrote to Horace to ask him to see the specialist, should she propose to come herself at the same time? To propose to go if she were not wanted! To propose to go and to be told not to!

She was yearning to get to him, but she could not face the possibility of such a rebuff—a rebuff that would make a real rupture, and she thought him capable of telling her that she was not wanted.

It was very hot that night, much hotter than it had been in the day. Kate was feeling ill as well as tired. Her head was aching, her eyes seemed framed in pain. Usually she was very strong, and her nerves were particularly well controlled; but to-night in this hot alien city, so entirely alone, while waiting for Dr. Saumur's opinion, she lost her self-restraint. A sudden gust of anger took possession of her once more. Was it not intolerable, horrible, that after all she had suffered, all she had forgiven, all she had done for him, he had sent her away from him at the end? He might have

spared her that, he might at least have thought of what it would look like to the world. Then in a moment she passed from anger to yearning, and half falling asleep, she seemed to see him holding out imploring hands, asking for her help in some appalling agony. Waking into consciousness of the nightmare, she got up, determined not to risk such a horror in sleep as that again. She shivered in the heat as she stood by the bed and looked at her watch. It took some moments before she could read it; her eyes seemed blurred. Three o'clock—not much more darkness. The doctor's answer would come in the course of to-day: even if he advised the examination, would it be cruel to disturb Horace with it? That question became the predominant one for some time, and then again the misery of her own position flooded her mind.

When, a few hours later, Dr. Saumur's letter was taken to her room, she could not understand what was said to her. The hotel servants telephoned to Dr. Saumur that the lady to whom he had written was too ill to read his letter. The great man sent a doctor at once who diagnosed Kate's condition as the result of a touch of the sun the day before. He insisted on absolute silence and darkness, and a nurse to ensure both.

XXIV

MUST I SEE THIS PARIS MAN?

PEACE had faded from Horace's face.

"Must I see this Paris man?" he asked the *curé*.

"You cannot be obliged to see him."

"It is so hard," said Blake; "they can do nothing. They will torture me, and then I can't bear the thought of false hopes. If it begins I know I shall hope to live. You understand that it is easier to bear the inevitable? I know I shall go to pieces under it. I shall lose my peace. I cannot see. . . . "

"God will take care of you, and if your wife wishes it, and the child?"

"I have been praying about it all the morning," said Horace, "and I can't believe it is God's will for me."

"My poor son, my poor son!" said the old man. "I do understand that this is a terrible moment." But in his heart the *curé* wanted the great Paris doctor to come. Of course, he would know more than the London doctors. He dreamed for the moment of Horace restored to life, and while he trembled at the idea, he felt that the whole history had been so amazing that he must not put bounds to his faith.

At last Horace decided to let Saumur come, and Trix was full of joy when she heard the news.

But from that moment her father became more difficult; it was hard to please him, though she saw that

he struggled to be pleased. Trix was thoroughly disheartened at last. Roberts felt the irritation to be returning in double force even when most restrained, and at moments it seemed as if it must burst out.

There was no light in Horace's soul now, for the joy and peace of the early days had become clouded. "He has to live in the dark for a time," thought his old friend. "May God shorten it."

To the sick man it seemed as if the darkness had increased with the disturbance of his peace by this new plan of his wife's. That his will never really failed was the conviction of the experienced old priest who kept very close to him. There were terrible moments of depression, and then of this new hope in which he never really believed. The results of old bad habits were there; his mind at moments seemed a prey to the thoughts his will detested. He was usually at peace in the church, but sometimes even that failed.

The patient's temperature was an anxiety to Roberts during these days. He began to wish for the responsibility to be taken off his shoulders, even by a Frenchman. He saw that Horace was tormenting himself horribly about the coming visit.

Trix would occasionally try to get at Roberts's mind.

"He can't let himself look at it easily, miss; he does not believe in it, and then at moments he sort of half believes in it. I wish we had him at home," said Roberts.

Trix had been so excited at the idea that she and Stephen Tempest had plotted a splendid plan, and now, instead of its bringing him hope and comfort, it seemed merely to increase the gloom. She was very miserable, very unhappy, and her heart turned to the

only thing that seemed to comfort her father. She had lately sat for an hour at a time in the church with him, and felt there a certain sense of peace. And then she talked to the *curé*, and presently to the *vicaire* and to the sacristan, about the great French doctor, who was coming to cure her father. And they all believed that healing must come out of Paris if it were to come from anywhere, and they all told her they would pray for her father's cure, and they were very sweet and gentle to her, for their kind hearts ached for the child.

The days and nights dragged on, for the great man wanted Roberts to give the patient a special treatment before the examination.

"I can't bear it," said Horace when he woke one morning, and Roberts did not like the way he said it.

For many weeks the *curé* had wondered if he ought to urge Blake to ask his wife to come. Was there some mystery of feeling between the two which he had not yet fathomed? Was there an unconscious reluctance to see the woman he had wronged so deeply? "Those who repent before God," he said to himself, "will not always repent before a woman." That was what the friend and counsellor sought to understand, and he came to the conclusion that he must remain ignorant. In dealing with others he often thought that he must not try to see too far. One step at a time, he said to himself, and what steps had not Blake mounted already? But Horace's reserve on the subject of his wife's coming did in the end melt quite suddenly.

The *curé* was sitting with the sick man, who was in bed that day by Roberts's advice, when at last Horace opened the question himself. He was not looking or speaking quite as usual; he did not seem to weigh his

own words. They had talked of very little things for some minutes, and then had fallen into silence.

"I want my wife," said Horace suddenly, speaking fretfully, like a child.

The *curé's* face brightened.

"She ought to be here; it is her right place."

"She is in Paris," said Horace.

"All the easier then."

"I can't understand it," said Horace, looking down as he spoke. "Dr. Saumur says nothing of her coming, and she has not written since she left London. I can't help thinking," he went on, and his wasted hands picked at the sheet, "—thinking what may be morbid. Do you know, I feel as if this time away from me may have changed her. She may have realised me and thrown me over at last. How can I ask her to come if she shrinks from me? How could I endure her in the room if she were changed to me? As long as I wanted to play that I was not dying I could not bear to read the truth in her face. Then for a time I felt as if I could not have the courage to be with her while I was making the great change in my life, knowing how she would hate it. But now, M. le Curé, God knows how I want her, and I dare not ask her to come." He shook his head with a dreary obstinacy.

"This is all morbid," said the *curé*. "Believe me, a woman who has been to you what Mrs. Blake has been would never fail you now."

"I feel as if she were angry with me," said Horace, with the strange look of clairvoyance that is not uncommon with sick people.

The *curé* was puzzled.

Horace murmured again, "I want my wife. I want her to sit in that chair and then to put her hand on my

forehead. I want—" He was silent, and then he said: "I can't understand how she bore with me. It seems so much more natural that she would give me up."

"No, no, no," said the *curé*.

"Thank you," said Horace, a faint smile breaking over his face. "I wanted somebody to say that."

Roberts was waiting for the *curé* in the next room. The door being shut, the man-nurse looked anxiously at the old priest.

"Did he mention Mrs. Blake, M. le Curé?"

"He wants her to come," said the *curé*.

"I had orders not to tell him that she is ill, but he will be angry when he finds out that he has been deceived. And I am sure he guesses something, and he looks awful when I take him in the letters and there 's nothing from her."

"I hope it 's not serious—the illness?"

"It was sunstroke, and she was bad at first; she has been kept in the dark with ice on her head for a week, and they think she is doing well."

"If she is quite out of danger he ought to be told that she has been ill," said the *curé* firmly. "It is better to have that amount of agitation than a misunderstanding."

Roberts shook his head:

"One must obey orders," he said.

The *curé* left him, resolved that if next day brought no change in the orders from Paris, he would himself write to Dr. Saumur.

A pale and very tired Roberts met the *curé* at the door of the hotel next morning.

"It has been an awful night," he said. "The Paris

doctor is coming the day after to-morrow; it 's quite time. Mrs. Blake comes with him.

"Ought I to see Mr. Blake?"

"You always do him good," said Roberts warmly, "and I 'll go for a turn if you 'll stay with him, M. le Curé. He is in no pain now; it would kill him if it were continuous."

Horace's face lit up as the *curé* came in. A pale smile showed up the worn, exaggerated lines of the features.

"She is coming the day after to-morrow; she has not been well and was n't allowed to do anything, even write. But she will motor out here with Dr. Saumur. They think the change will do her good. I have made sure of that. I insisted that Roberts should telephone again to make sure." He seemed excited, and talked quickly of a number of details as to Kate's room and spoke with irritation of the difficulty of getting a large one on the side with the best view of the sea and the islands.

In fact, the manageress and the staff generally had by now come to the conclusion that the wife who had so long neglected the dying man was a fine lady for whom nothing was good enough.

Trix came in with two large bits of green pottery which Horace wanted for Kate's room. They were approved.

"That one for red roses; the other for white lilies," he said.

The *curé* felt that there was a febrile touch in poor Horace's apparent pleasure in these details. His eyes were large and shining.

"I wrote her a card. I put: 'Can't you come yourself?' And then to-day her doctor telephoned that she

had been ill, but that he would let her motor out with Dr. Saumur. She will be sitting where you are the day after to-morrow."

The *curé* found it harder to restrain tears than he had ever found it in Horace's company before.

At last Roberts came in—to show that he was again on duty. He glanced at the *curé*, who understood that the patient had talked enough and rose to leave the room.

Horace looked up at him as he said "good-bye" with terrible anguish in his face.

"Such a night," he murmured. Then, shyly, but with an absence of reticence that was very rare in him about his spiritual actions. "The pain in the night I offer in expiation for the wrong I have done to Kate: in the day for the wrong I have done to Trix—but I shan't have to bear it much longer now."

To the *curé's* surprise he was asked early next morning to bring Holy Communion to Mr. Blake. Horace had had a better night and felt better. He looked much more peaceful. Indeed, his pulse was a little stronger, and in the afternoon he got up and went out. Leaning on Roberts and with Trix beside him, he reached the presbytery. The *vicaire* hurried out with the old armchair, and they put it just round the corner of the house in view of the sea. The day had been hot, but cool airs now blew from the north and ruffled the water.

"I was dreading the examination," said Horace, "but to-day I feel stronger." He was silent. "God has been amazingly good to me," he said presently. "I don't feel the joy in His goodness that I felt at first, but somewhere in me I am at peace."

"Yes," said the *curé*, whose own peace was maintained in the midst of constantly increasing suffering.

"Even what ought to trouble me, troubles me little to-day. I can leave my wife to God. 'Forgive and you shall be forgiven,' are the words that always haunt me when I think of her. And—and she comes to-morrow. I don't think I shall be able to tell her much. He faltered. His look had become misty and dulled; he seemed to be trying to see something more clearly. He did not hear Roberts coming along the gravel to help him back, and he forgot to say good-night to the *curé*.

"My feet are cold," he said to Roberts in a dull voice. The *vicaire* helped Roberts to take him back to the hotel, and there again there was no parting word.

XXV

IS HE DYING?

TRIX had been reading *Quentin Durward* aloud to her father, and then he had talked of his boyhood and how he and Mary had first read it together. It had been a delightful evening, and he was in no pain. As she went up to her room she saw Roberts speaking to the manageress.

"I don't want to frighten her," he was saying in a low voice. "I may be mistaken, but I have telegraphed to Mrs. Blake and I should like to have someone sitting up to-night who could fetch the doctor and the *curé*."

At two in the morning the presbytery bell was tinkling. Roberts had been right; the blood-poisoning he had detected had spread rapidly, the body was already swollen when the two physicians arrived, and the physician of the body soon gave his place to M. le Curé.

Horace lay with his eyes shut, breathing heavily. The old man stood watching him in silence, and then his trembling hand caressed the thin one that lay on the coverlet; it was getting cold.

Presently Horace opened his eyes and gazed round him with a look of fear. Then it seemed to the experienced onlooker as if the will that had failed so miserably was passing through one more struggle, and he yearned to help him. Whatever the struggle was it lasted but a moment, and then his eyes

were fixed on the *curé's* face with a wistful look of resignation.

"I have brought you Holy Communion, my dear son."

Horace raised himself with a great effort.

"He cannot get up," said Roberts anxiously.

"Lie still," said the *curé* with authority.

Horace was still and two great tears lay on the wasted cheeks.

Trix was brought in by the manageress.

"He is to receive *le bon Dieu*," she had said to the child when she woke her.

She had dressed quickly while the usually voluble Frenchwoman helped her in silence.

"Is he dying?" faltered Trix, and a look of terror came into her face.

"It seems so; be brave," said the other, while ready tears of sympathy welled into her eyes.

Trix as in a dream came into the room, which seemed full of people. The *curé* with his stole on was standing by a little table on which were a crucifix and candles and some white flowers. There was a faint odour of some sort in the room, although the great window was wide open and an infinite number of stars were visible.

She felt separated by an enormous distance from the figure on the bed. A strange man was kneeling near the door and a nun. She hardly noticed them, but she also knelt down. The *curé* spoke in Latin, and the nun answered. The *curé* gave Horace Holy Communion. After that there was silence for a few moments, and then Horace said something that Trix could not understand. There was a look on her father's face that frightened her, a light that baffled

her. Then all expression faded and he breathed with still greater difficulty. Roberts raised him up and made a sign to the priest who was between Horace and the window. He understood, and came on the other side. Roberts held him towards the air and the sky.

The dying man murmured something unintelligible, with a look of distress.

Then the priest blessed him and held up the crucifix. His eyes were fixed upon it, while the breathing became more and more terribly laboured. A few moments later the look of distress suddenly passed; something had relaxed. The face was instantly younger.

"He is better," thought Trix.

The doctor and Roberts looked at each other.

"You must come away, my child," said the manageress very firmly, and taking Trix's hand drew her out of the room.

The old *curé* followed them into the little sitting-room where she had been reading *Quentin Durward* to her father that evening. The book lay open on the table. There, too, the windows were open, the dawn was faintly suggested on the sea and sky.

"He is better," said Trix in a terrified voice to the priest.

The *curé* drew her towards the window.

"It is hard for you, my dear child, but for him——"

"Is he dead?"

"Yes; God has taken him."

Trix sat down, absolutely dazed.

"He would have suffered terribly if he had lived. He has borne all he could bear. To-night he had no pain. It must be a consolation to you that you have been his comfort to the end."

Then Trix cried as freely as only a child can cry. She was cold, desolate, frightened, and it seemed as if the old man's voice had come from far away. Then the manageress made her drink some hot coffee, but she became hysterical.

"I 'll put her to bed," said the Frenchwoman.

She led her from the room still dazed. After an hour she came back and found the old *curé* sitting by the window.

"Still here!" she cried. "The child is asleep. You will catch cold."

"I spent too many nights and dawns on the sea when I was a boy to take harm now."

"Her mother comes to-day," said the manageress in a doubtful tone.

Roberts opened the door of the bedroom.

"You can come in now, sir," he said, and the old priest went in.

The nun had moved the little improvised altar to the foot of the bed. The blind was down. Four tall candle-sticks held yellow tapers burning dimly.

Horace's face looked very young; surely the light in the face still came from those closed eyes.

"Take away the altar and the candlesticks," said the *curé* to the little nun. "Draw up the blind. There is a little cross next his heart; that is enough."

After taking away the tall candlesticks the nun spoke again in a puzzled voice.

"And the flowers?"

"Leave the flowers. Go, my good Sister, I will stay here "

Presently Roberts came back into the room.

"He did not suffer to-night?" said the *curé* in a low voice.

"He had suffered awfully till to-night," the man answered. "I 've seen deaths of all sorts, M. le Curé, but I never saw a patient suffer as much as Mr. Blake did, nor with such pluck. It 's my belief that if he had n't had such pluck he 'd have gone out of his mind. I hope, M. le Curé, that Mrs. Blake won't think I ought to have sent for her before last night and fetched in the doctor sooner. It came so sudden. I 'd no fear of blood-poisoning two days ago."

They were silent.

"If you are staying here, sir, I 'll just telephone the news to London by Paris, sir. The papers will want to know at once."

The old man had it on his lips to tell him to wait till Mrs. Blake came in, and Roberts understood him.

"Only the fact of the death," he said, "the rest Mrs. Blake will settle about."

"You must not go out of the hotel. You are the person to tell her that it is over," urged the *curé*.

Then Roberts left, and the old priest knelt down by the bed and prayed.

Presently he heard the sound of a horn and a motor drew up outside.

He looked round the room. There was nothing there to hurt her unnecessarily. There were still a few stars; the dawn had been grey and the water quiet. There was no sparkle on the sea.

He went out into the passage and passed down the back stairs. The husband and wife should meet alone.

XXVI

TOO LATE

THAT long night's drive was over. The stars that had given Kate strength were fading.

The great doctor had found her a strong woman, and had at first talked science to her. He had told her plainly after Roberts had given the alarm that it was of no use to take him out there; it was clearly not a moment for examinations, for a new treatment. But Kate had insisted. He might be of use in preventing pain.

Once in the night drive she said to him:

"My husband was born a Catholic, and he has been reconciled."

"It is not uncommon."

"I believe he has made himself worse with all that superstitious nonsense."

"Ah, but often on the contrary it improves the health for a time. Science has not said the last word on the subject, madame. I have myself advised sending for a priest, though I hate the species, because I find it does good." He smiled a subtle smile. "We must use anything we can at times, must we not?"

"But if it 's nôt true?"

"What is truth? Shall we ask those stars?"

They became silent watching the stars till the physician went to sleep, and the strength and greatness of the night seemed to pass into Kate's soul. She seemed to see herself and her whole life on a different plane,

in a different way than she had ever seen them before. She lost her anger at the thought of the religious mummeries she had dreaded. She lost the old scarred, seared bitterness as to her own wrongs, she was lifted into some different element from the air she had breathed hitherto. And in the great spaciousness it seemed as if Horace said something to her which explained the whole mystery of what they were and had been to each other. It was absolutely clear and lucid, both what was said and the nearness of the speaker. He was as evidently with her as the great truth of their eternal love was patent to her whole being. Time was not and space was not. Then with a slight prosaic weary shock she knew the limits that held her on earth. She turned to the doctor.

"I am sorry to rouse you," she said, "but I have at this moment the strongest conviction that my husband is dead."

They looked at their watches. Time had become of enormous importance to her as evidence of that escape from earthly conditions.

Roberts was in the doorway of the long, low, white hotel.

"You were right," said the doctor as they saw his face.

"Is it over?" said Kate.

Roberts signed assent, and they went in.

She went up-stairs guided by him, and he left her at the door. She passed in, and even then felt some relief that there were no externals of religion to be seen, but she did not look at the figure on the bed. She crossed the room, and sat down by the window and looked at the sea. Then, with an immense effort

she moved to the bed; what lay there seemed to her simply horrible, it was not like him, this thing; it was not Horace, it was terrible! This look of youth was not a real one, it was a horror, a grimace to her. Ah! if she had not seen it, if she had only remembered him as she had seen him when he left London. She looked at the sea again, the sense of uplifting on the drive had gone; she thought there was an odour of death in the room. She got up. The shame, the abasement of death appalled her. She was moving across the room, but as she passed the foot of the bed she saw another look, a look not of meretricious youth but of power in the forehead and of thought. She turned back, sank by the bed and kissed the cold forehead, and her heart cried out to him for the forgiveness of which she had given so large a measure to him. Then, fearing lest that better impression should be lost in the horror that had gone before, she went out of the room.

The manageress saw at once that this woman who had not wept would not need sympathy from her.

"There was coffee for madame in her own room. Miss Trix was asleep, worn out."

Kate had forgotten Trix; she bowed and followed the manageress to her own room and then asked for Roberts.

"Did he suffer at the end?"

"Not at the end; not all yesterday."

Then she questioned him closely, and he told her from his point of view the history of the last days.

"He used to refuse the morphia when the pain was at its worst until I spoke to the *curé*. Then the morphia failed; Sir Thomas had said it would."

Kate turned from this detestable, unendurable piece of horror.

Then she wrote telegrams, sheaves of telegrams. She put in them that the death had been painless, that the end had been entirely unexpected, that Mrs. Blake had brought the great specialist from Paris. That he had died very peacefully, uplifted towards the stars that shone above a still sea.

Kate was intensely conscious of wishing to get everything settled rightly. Roberts was in and out of the room asking questions, receiving orders. Doctor Saumur came in to say "good-bye," and she was extraordinarily anxious to be polite—to make sure that he had been made comfortable.

"Madame," he ventured to say before he went away, "you know now that you had the consolation of a psychic communication in the night at the very moment of death, do you not?" She seemed not to understand him. A man of less experience would have thought her calm.

Presently the *curé* was mentioned by Roberts, and a look of intense repulsion appeared on Kate's white face. If only there was a favourable answer to her telegram to Stephen Tempest, the *curé* need have no more to do with the funeral than if Horace had died before he knew him.

Among the first telegrams had been one asking Stephen to find out if there would be any question of Blake being buried in the Abbey. It was impossible to say when anything like a definite answer could reach her.

There had been at once questions of the formalities of the French law, in which Roberts could be of no use. Mrs. Blake summoned the local doctor. M. le Curé sent to ask if he could be of any use, and was told that Madame Blake thanked him, but would not give him

the trouble. At last it seemed as if she could think of nothing else to do. Trix was reported to be still asleep.

Kate rose from the table and stood by the window. She did not see the water now blazing in the sun, nor hear the shrill voices of the summer visitors. She was cold, wearied; at the same moment half conscious of her surroundings, and yet acutely conscious of her physical conditions. She went very quietly along the passage and opened the door of Horace's room. The room was still and shaded. As the day advanced the closing of the outside shutters had become necessary. There had been a slight change in the face lying on the smooth pillow. There is something terrible in the unruffled whiteness of the pillow that supports a motionless head. The change in the face meant little to Kate. It was not Horace's face—it was Death's face, not his. But suddenly as she stood there the tension broke and a wail came from her white lips. It was very low, no one heard it. It came again and again. "Why did n't they tell me? Why was I allowed to come too late?" She spoke aloud in an agony of reproach. Then suddenly she knelt down and rested her head on the edge of the pillow.

"Why did I let him keep me away?" She almost doubted if she had failed in her love while the agony of that love held her in its grasp. The greatest passions can hold room for doubt; the finite mind is overstrained by the passion that is infinite. She knew really that it was for his sake she had stayed away, that to force herself upon him would have aggravated his suffering, might as far as she could tell have produced even some mental collapse—but yet she doubted as saints doubt in their own dark hours whether they love God at all.

"You did tell me to come in the end, love, and you knew that I was coming." But then came another wail breaking from the great wordless anguish that possessed her whole nature, torn asunder, crushed by pain, half alive with a terrible vitality, half dead with his death to whom she had given herself. An hour passed, and then, not because anything changed in herself or her suffering, anything made it more or less intolerable to be there, but because another thought had struck her, she left the room. Trix might be awake, and she ought to go to her. A maid met her and said that mademoiselle was awake, and pointed to her door. But when she got into the room she saw Trix lying with her head on her arm, still asleep. She stood for a moment watching her and fighting down a kind of repulsion that had suddenly seized upon her. Her sorrow, her anguish, were hers alone; the child who slept so peacefully would never know them, but that child had been with him while she was sent away. Trix knew, as far as a child could, all those precious details that Kate could only hear through her, handed on by their possessor,—the last days, the last hours. Trix would want to tell her all about them. And that Kate could not endure. No one can bear more than is bearable. Two things she could not bear—to have anything to do with the *curé*, or to hear Trix speak of what she had seen and heard. That would be the breaking-point.

Trix, opening her eyes, started. The white, wan face with the agony, without the peace, of a *Mater Dolorosa* was looking down on her.

"Oh, mother!" she said; and putting her hands over her face she began to cry.

That was best, and Kate, moving quickly to the

head of the bed and leaning forward, put her arms round her.

"Trix dear, dear child, it is all over."

"Why did n't they know sooner?" cried Trix. "Why did n't Roberts get more frightened? It is so awful that you did not know."

Kate could not speak, but her touch became still more tender and caressing.

Trix's heart had guided her right so far. But how could there be a real fusion between the young nature —elastic, romantic in its grief—and the infinite regions of pain, of want, in the soul of the woman that was stretched on the rack of relentless nature without comfort and without hope? It was inevitable that Trix should add her shafts that would quiver in Kate's mind. She prattled through her tears to the woman who seemed petrified, of the last evening; of how he had talked of his childhood, of his sister, nothing in that about Kate herself. And yet when Trix spoke of how anxious he had been that Kate's room should look pretty, she felt it physically unbearable. She could bear to hear neither of the silence as to herself, nor of his thought for her, from Trix.

She took her arms from round her and stood motionless, looking out of the window. The silence gradually made itself felt as a chill to the crying girl. Kate's face was stony.

"You had better have some food up her, dear," she said very gently, interrupting a fresh sentence. Trix felt it strange not to be able to go on with what she was saying.

"I don't think I want anything. Have you had anything, mother?"

"Yes," said Kate firmly, not knowing that she had, in fact, eaten nothing since she left Paris.

A knock at the door. Roberts had brought a telegram to Mrs. Blake.

"Find Abbey tomb out of the question. Writing. Deepest sympathy—TEMPEST."

If she could have felt any external fact still to be the subject of great regret, great disappointment, it was this. She was in the doorway as she read the telegram and going into the passage she shut the door behind her.

Horace to her now would live in his fame, in his works, in the admiration, the gratitude of his fellow men. To increase, to perpetuate this posthumous fame was, in a certain sense, to defeat death.

This first blow, this gross bit of ingratitude and officialdom, only set the passion of her nature more hotly on her task.

"The funeral will be here," she said to Roberts in a businesslike tone. "Is the doctor coming in again soon?"

"He said he would be here at half-past two."

"Meanwhile I will go to the cemetery; you had better show me the way. And say that some soup and wine must be sent up at once for Miss Trix.

There were so many graves with crosses, on which were hung for the most part curiously ugly wreaths of immortelles and bead crowns and common pictures in bead frames.

Kate felt frantic as she stood in the midst of these. Even the great outlook on the sea and the strange

miniature archipelago of many-coloured rocks glorious in the sunshine could not compensate for the tawdry, confused, unlovely things at her feet.

"There is a piece of ground farther to the right," said Roberts, "where there are no graves yet. M. le Curé mentioned it to me this morning."

And therefore Horace's grave is on a rising hillock to the right as you go into the cemetery and a costly piece of ground round it was secured by purchase. Standing by it there seems to be nothing nearer than the sea and the sky.



PART II







I

TOO SOON

STEPHEN received a short letter from Trix posted on the eve of her father's death. He did not know then that the end had already come.

"The day is at last fixed," she wrote, "and the great doctor will be here the day after to-morrow. I hope and trust that we were right, but I am afraid that father is dreading the visit. I wish you could have come back, you might have helped him; you always did him good.

"It is very kind of you to want to know about me. You guessed right; I am not sleeping very well. I try not to seem too anxious for his sake, but I cannot help it. He wants me to be out by the sea, but I don't like being alone on the beach as I did when I first came here. I have not seen the sunset from the sands since the last evening you were here.

"It is a good thing that mother is able to come now. I am sure he needs her. I wish I were a better nurse. I will let you know what Dr. Saumur says as soon as I am told."

The note of failure and discouragement distressed Stephen. He thought of the dark lines that must be visible round those brown eyes, with their blue depths. Even her mother had not seemed to think enough of what the child must be going through. But then, no doubt, during his talks with Mrs. Blake, she had been

absorbed in the thought of her husband. Even when Trix had betrayed to him that she was hurt by her mother's want of sympathy, Stephen had been able to see Kate's side in the matter. It was no wonder if, during those last weeks, she had thought almost exclusively of the husband to whom she had evidently devoted her life. He could not believe that Mrs. Blake was wanting in the deeper motherly feelings. This had been an abnormal, critical time—not the ordinary state of her mind and feelings. It was unthinkable that a woman of her type should be jealous, and unkind to her own child. He was convinced that she was simply absolutely preoccupied, so that if there had been a want of feeling for Trix it had been unknown to herself.

He was still holding Trix's letter when a telegram from St. Jean des Pluies was brought to him.

"Horace died peacefully during the night. Am obliged to make arrangements immediately. Could you let me know if Abbey funeral likely?

"KATHERINE BLAKE."

His first thought was the question whether Blake's wife had seen him before the end; his first feeling was for Trix's sorrow. Then he had an awe-struck image in his mind of Horace's face with those wonderful eyes shut. Would there be light still in the features? He thought there must be; he could not conceive Horace Blake's face without that strange, luminous quality. He stood holding the flimsy paper in his hand for some moments before he grasped the purport of what he was asked to do, and then a strong feeling of repugnance slowly rose in his mind. How could he know,

how could he find out at once, what would be the official or the public feeling as to Horace Blake's funeral? He saw that she, poor woman, had really taken it for granted. But the haste of this inquiry seemed almost indelicate—he disliked it. He had another picture in his mind of the broken-hearted widow, hardly able to think of these things at all; and then of a wave of public feeling carrying the point in spite of want of encouragement, even of hostility, on the part of the officials. He was too inexperienced to know how rare is the wave of public feeling that has not been prepared for in private. Neither could he have understood the terrible, external activity of some parts of a woman's nature during the agony that men call the breaking of a heart. Where is the "widow indeed" who sits gently crying in the darkened room, leaving the sordid cares to others? Who has known her? And who has not known the "widow indeed" who makes everything as difficult as possible for everybody? Or the one who, like Kate, does the too sensible, too practical, too matter-of-fact thing with one part of her faculties, because there is part of her that is dead, and there can be no balance of the nature without a long readjustment?

Kate was quite right, in fact, to make this inquiry about the Abbey without delay. There would be endless complications as to a temporary grave in a foreign land, and if she brought the body home now she must know where it was to be taken. Stephen did not realise this, but he did think that if it were to be done, perhaps she was right to choose such an insignificant individual as himself, who was not even a relation, to make the inquiry privately. He had ceased to be surprised at the demands made on his

friendship by the Blake family. He did all that could conceivably be done before he sent the negative answer. He was not entirely surprised at the absolute refusal even to entertain the idea on the part of the authorities at the Abbey. Before so very long he understood plainly enough why they had not been ready to give those honours to the famous dead which had seemed to poor Mrs. Blake so obviously his due.

Tired and depressed, Stephen went to his club in the evening, and, taking up an early edition of the evening paper, read in it the announcement of Horace Blake's death. What he saw first was the simple announcement of what Roberts had telephoned to Paris, but later editions had received and written up Kate's own telegrams. The point they threw into relief was the absence of suffering. "He passed away peacefully," they said, "looking at the stars and the sea." It seemed that his wife had been there, and the great specialist. There were short leaders on his career, which said modestly that it was too soon to decide what would be Blake's niche in the temple of fame, but undoubtedly he was the dramatist who had produced the most marked revolution in modern English drama. Then, to avoid the difficulty of saying what he was, they fell back on saying what he was not, and explained that he was not really at all like half a dozen other dramatists. There was very little biography, but one journalist said that he had been educated in a Roman Catholic seminary.

By the following morning everything had swelled to enormous dimensions. Two illustrated papers had pictures of Blake supported by his wife, gazing, with a look of immense enjoyment on his face, at a sky with

stars as big as tea-trays, and a scenic distance of illuminated sea.

There were several longer articles on the dead man's work. The more thoughtful writers evidently felt very strongly that Blake had never given out his whole mind to the world. Was his genius, asked one, simply calculated to focus the evils of a decadent civilisation, and of moribund religious ideas? to make men face the things that were concealed from their eyes by conventionality masking as decency? all the huge self-deception of men in their treatment of women, all the greed and self-love that made women accept their position, all the nonsense of education and the tyranny of the Churches? He had thrown the lowest side of everything to the top, revealing the basest forms of vitality, and insisting that men should blindfold their eyes no longer. But it could hardly be asserted that that was all, because that would be to ignore the great creations of men and women, characters just true and holy, which surely had been the very soul of his greater dramas. But whether he put prophecies or blasphemies into the mouth of a cleric, showed truth or self-advertisement to be the unique object of an inspired poet, made a woman ready to die for love, or coldly analyse it into the mask of greed, a man give his whole life as a protest against sin, or callously defend a traffic in vice, he never showed what he himself felt, or thought, or judged of any of these things. His characters bore their own burden. Horace Blake was an enigma, and they had all been waiting for further development, further light, when he had passed out of their reach. One critic boldly advanced a view that there had been nothing further to develop. Enormous as was the loss of anything

Blake might have written, this writer did not believe that there would be any other revelation of his deepest conviction than what they had already. The dramatic faculty, he wrote, was Blake's to an uncommon degree, but such a gift can develop itself without developing a consistent line of thought. He made us see what he saw, and what we should never have seen for ourselves; but it would have been useless to ask him to tell us what he thought about the world he showed us. Probably the very gift that made him absorbed in seeing, and the passionate revolt against what he saw, prevented the growth of a calmer thought.

Will the world never learn, asked this writer, that the greatest man is possessed of only one brain, one nervous system; that each man is in reality a specialist, limited to his special faculties, and that no one can see at the back of his own head?

Two or three others simply hinted that Horace had been forced to wear a mask; he was the victim of the censor. They had a knowing air about this, as if they could, if they would, have told their readers exactly what it was that Horace had never been allowed to say. Others again pressed for further information. They said that, of course, there must be much left behind in letters, in perhaps half-finished work, in the knowledge of his friends, that would give the unknown side of Blake to the world; for this they would wait rather than form a premature judgment. Before long the other side of the great dramatist, the personal opinions, the unknown quality in his mind would fill in the blanks and complete the circle.

Stephen read all the literary criticism with the keenest interest. He felt as if he already possessed

light on the unknown places; it was impossible not to feel that his knowledge of the soul he had met with at that last station of life must interpret to him his whole work. But the personal side of the things written about Blake disgusted him as sheer repulsive journalism.

While reading what the public knows of its favourites, we are often inclined to a cheap irony. We know that every wife or daughter who, we are told, was with the dying man to the last, had not necessarily the adoring love that is imputed to them. We suspect these journalistic domestic dramas. Stephen knew something about this one and its peculiar tragedy. He had been with Trix and had known what those last weeks together had been to father and daughter. There was, indeed, the mystery and awful sadness of the relations between husband and wife; but the exquisite beauty of the romance of father and daughter was still more present to him, and through it he saw Horace glorified. He felt even the paragraphs about the sky that Horace had gazed at, or the "simple village folk" among whom he had spent the last weeks, or the "simple room" in which he had died, with its "simple furniture" and its glorious outlook, to be repulsive. But when one paper alluded to the daughter who had read Scott—" always his favourite reading from a child"—aloud to him up to the last moment, Stephen squirmed.

What he felt to be repulsive was the mannerism of the whole thing; the new conventionality of the treatment of the great facts of death and loss. Were the harping on simplicity and the incessant allusions to nature and the "peaceful passing away," and all the implied adulation, in the least more real than the

most pompous phraseology of the eighteenth century inscriptions on tombstones?

The depth of the unreality lay in the truth that whatever Horace had said, or done, or committed, or suffered; whatever the men who wrote the paragraphs really thought of him, they would have written just those same things with the same force of an affectation of realism, and of a contempt for grandeur or pretension. That is a marked thing in our modern manners, the extraordinary divorce between the world's talk in print and the talk of men from mouth to mouth.

There was much talk in newspaper offices about Horace Blake during the first nights after his death, and facts—real and supposed—were discussed by the men who were writing about him, that were unknown to his nearest friends and relations. But there was no fear of this knowledge in the least affecting the articles that were written.

"The last time I saw Horace Blake," was a charming account of a talk with the author of *False Measures* about the general state of the drama, by a man who whispered that his wife had declared last winter that never again would she agree to meet Blake at a supper-party: "his talk was *the limit.*"

"The great dramatist at home," gave a delightful picture of life at the Blakes' cottage by a man who had never been there, and who believed that very few marriages (and he was no optimist as to marriage) were as miserable as that of the Horace Blakes.

"Blake as I knew him," was written by a man who had once travelled with him for an hour or so.

"What Frenchmen thought of Blake," supposed that a group of *littérateurs* had hung about him during his stay on the coast of Brittany. There was one

short article on his views of education and the way in which he had brought up his daughter. There was one on his supposed love of dogs, which also enumerated his favourite flowers. If there could have been printed in parallel columns what the writers thought they knew of Blake with what they wrote of him, what a remarkably interesting study it would have been! Nobody would have been more astonished than Stephen, had he had such a revelation as to Horace, and what some of the underworld of literature thought about him. Stephen was not a gossip, or he might at this time have acquired knowledge that would have saved him much future trouble. But he was not in touch with Horace's intimates, and the few he knew slightly, finding that he was a personal friend of Blake's widow, were discreet.

As it was, the papers were doing just what Kate and Roberts wanted from their different points of view. Roberts admired it all immensely. Kate knew its utility; it was the necessary support of popular fame, and if there were silly notes in the volume of sound, even they swelled the total amount.

Presently it was announced in the papers that Blake had wished to be buried in Brittany, and soon the quiet spot he had chosen on the hillside, whence the murmur of the waves was heard day and night, had been described in a dozen papers.

"How about the shadow of a cypress?" said one journalist to another. "Safe, eh?"

"There 's a cypress somewhere about, you bet."

Stephen himself had refused to write an appreciation for any paper or magazine.

"Too soon," he wrote in answer to the editors who asked him to do so. He could not yet intrude

upon the Blake with whom he had watched the sunset on that western coast, the Blake who had said that he had not expected to find a friend at the last station of the journey.

II

A REAL BOOK

THREE weeks after Blake's death Stephen got a note from Mrs. Blake, asking him to come and see her. It was written from a house in Wimbledon, lent her by Mr. and Mrs. George Shenstone. Mrs. Shenstone, it seemed (and the fact surprised Stephen, who had a slight acquaintance with these rich city folk), was an old friend of Kate's, and she had now put her house and her servants at the widow's disposal. The fact was that the public excitement over Blake's death had roused a rather dormant friendship to enthusiasm. It was not a kindness thrown away; the villa stood in a large retired garden, the rooms were delightful, the servants admirable. Kate was more indifferent to comfort than is usual with women of her age; but she was not indifferent to having petty worries and cares taken off her hands. The space, too, was a comfort; she was able to be a little more alone than would have been possible in a small house.

Stephen, on arriving, was shown at once into a heavily furnished library. Mrs. Blake was sitting at a big table covered with papers. Stephen hardly realised the surroundings; he only knew that he had to greet her and to meet her sad, direct gaze. She rose tall above the table, and leaning a little across it, held out a hand which gave the firm grasp that he always liked from her. The intimacy was very real, although of such recent growth. He had come in

embarrassed with the thought of the telegram, the failure of his mission. It would be a difficult enough visit anyhow, but that failure made it worse. But when he saw her he forgot that discordant note. There was something great and calm in her sorrow. When he had seen her before she had been in a strange trouble, she had been kept away from the dying man—that was unnatural. This widowhood, with its anguish, was comparatively simple. Indeed, it seemed to him that it was exactly the condition which brought out the noblest side of her; even her appearance had gained indefinitely. There was unity in her nature now, and if the oneness of feeling was pain, it was not conflict. Such was his swift impression. Then he tried to speak, though he liked the silence far better, and he fell from lack of inspiration into the very form of words he had disliked.

"There was no suffering at the end?" he said, as if he were laying one more brick on the piled-up building of assurances to that effect.

"The end was most peaceful," she said, "and if he had lived even a little longer it might have been terrible."

She paused. She did not go back upon the fact that the suffering had been terrible in the last weeks—terrible, indeed, two days before, terrible even to the last twenty-four hours.

Stephen's tongue again failed him. He felt as if every word he could say must have been printed a dozen times by now.

Her answer had been the kindly acceptance and return of the ordinary phrases; her look made it deeper, gave it a true friendliness. A different light came into her face for a moment.

"There has been an extraordinary amount of public feeling," she said.

"Yes, indeed," answered Stephen earnestly. Could she draw any satisfaction from that newspaper commotion?

"It has been very touching," she went on, a certain suppressed excitement showing itself. She moved restlessly now; her stillness was troubled. "There is a great deal to be done."

A sense of the enormous pathos of the weakness left in all her strength caught at his throat. It was as incongruous as if a prophetess had become restless on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Then she leaned on her elbow, and for a moment pressed her beautiful hand on her forehead as if in difficulty for a remembrance or a decision. She raised her head and looked at him with a slow glance, almost as if she were examining him under some new idea, or as if fresh light could be gained by merely looking at him.

"I want to talk to you about something important," she said. "Ah! how tiresome," for a sleek and kindly butler now came in. "It is the lawyer. Yes, I must see him. Are you in a hurry, Mr. Tempest? Could you possibly wait twenty minutes for me? I want to be able to talk quietly with you. I should not be more than twenty minutes, and Trix would like to see you."

"I 'm in no sort of hurry," said Stephen; "let me go into another room."

"Yes, here, into the drawing-room." She led him across the big library lined with books and opened a door.

The next room had red blinds drawn down; it was

all pink and warm and full of flowers, not oppressively hot. Stephen in a moment realised that Trix was lying back in a deep armchair in a corner by a screen. She looked very thin and pale in her black garments, and her white forehead and her large eyes shone like light out of the blackness.

"At last," she said quickly, "at last."

Her tone was touching, almost piteous. They moved together to a sofa near the window, and sat down.

"It was all no use, our plan about the great doctor; it only made him unhappy, that is what I cannot bear now. He dreaded it so; he was never so bright after it was suggested to him until the last day, the last evening."

"We did our best," said Stephen simply, "and I don't think it can have made any real difference. Probably it was because his illness was advancing more rapidly that he seemed like that. And the last evening——?"

"Yes, the last evening," said Trix eagerly, "we were so happy. I read aloud to him and then he talked of when he was a child. He told me everything, all the tricks he and his sister played on their nurse, and all the little silly things, and how they kept their birthdays and about—about the day he made his First Communion."

She was silent.

Stephen said nothing for a moment.

"I am thankful you had that."

"It is precious, is n't it?" said Trix, and big tears welled out of her eyes. "But I would not tell anybody but you. I have told nobody anything about it all, except the *curé* and the old sacristan, who was

only a joke when you were there, but they were so kind to me. You see, a great deal of it was dreadful. Poor mother could not bear the old *curé* having been so much with father, and she would do everything through Roberts, and it became so strange and rude. I think he knew how much I minded it, but if she had sent orders by the servants he would have taken them, he was so devoted to father. She was very strange—very kind to me, very anxious to take care of me, but she never mentioned father's name, never wanted to know anything from me, only from Roberts. I was simply in the way, and she did not think it good for me to be in the room where father was laid, so I used to go and sit and cry by the sea, but the *vicaire* found me one day, and the *curé* another, and I went to church as much as I could."

"And—?" said he.

"It is n't nonsense, that religion, after all, Mr. Tempest. I knew it as soon as my father was dead, but—but—I went to ask the *curé* to let me be a Catholic too, and he would n't let me."

"Good old man," said Stephen gently.

"I must wait," said Trix. "I don't know why. I am eighteen. I have seen so much for my age. I have been through so much, I ought to be able to judge for myself. The funeral was beautiful. Mother and Aunt Anne did n't understand it, but the *vicaire* explained it all to me the day before. Have you ever heard the *Benedictus* sung by an open grave?"

"Never."

The girl's eyes had a far-off look in them. Then, coming back to facts:

"Do you know that M. le Curé has cancer, and he had put off his operation to attend to father? It is

to be done on Monday and the *vicaire* will send me a telegram. He will have heaps of prayers. I will let you know when I hear. They were good to me," she went on, "and they did n't only care about the papers and the fuss and father's fame; they liked to talk about how patient he had been and how he had loved me and how he had prayed. He died like a saint, the little nun said. I hardly know myself what happened when he died. I was so dazed."

"Poor child!" said Stephen gently. "I wonder you were not ill afterwards."

"No, I was quite well, only tired, but——"

The door opened and there was Mrs. Blake. They were both so very sorry to be disturbed that she could not but see it.

"We will come back soon, Trix." There was a tone in her voice Tempest had not heard before, rich and kind he thought, but sad and a little aloof.

They were soon back in the library, sitting in two leather chairs near the empty fireplace. Her hands lay white and still on her black dress. Perhaps his sympathy was less quickened for her now; his thoughts were still with Trix in the other room.

"I wonder if you will be surprised at what I am going to say?" she began. "I want to ask you to write the Life of my husband. I cannot do it myself for many reasons, and there is no one I should like to do the work as much as you."

Hardly anything could have astonished Stephen so utterly. He sank back in the chair as if he had been thrust down by a strong hand.

"Good God!" he said. "I am indeed amazed."

Kate gave him a moment to recover himself, and in that moment he saw her position in a flash. She

wanted to have the book written at once, before this fickle, busy world had turned to other things. It was her idea of his real monument. He remembered how she had advocated extreme truthfulness. Would she hold to that now? He did not think, as some men might have done, that there would not be much story to tell. The story of a mind's action seemed to him quite as worth telling as the story of any other life of action. It would fascinate him to discover the genesis and development of Blake's dramatic genius. And then Horace was father to the child sitting crying a little in the next room.

"You would—" He blushed. "You would wish for a real book, you would wish it to be quite true?" he said.

"A real book," she answered firmly.

"I will do it, Mrs. Blake, although I 'm not a bit fit to do it; but that is your responsibility. It is very good of you to trust me. It is an immense thing for me."

Then Anne Coniston came into the room and found a pleasant-faced young man with a good brow and dark eyes, sitting opposite to her sister.

"Mr. Tempest will write the biography, Anne."

"Yes," said Stephen, rising. "I will do my best."

A face that was a very mild edition of Kate's face was turned towards him but he did not notice her.



III

DON'T

THAT night Stephen went to the theatre to see a play of Blake's that had just been revived, and which he had not seen before. It was called *Puritan Anne.*

He came away feeling the necessity of a talk with somebody, and, after a moment's reflection, realised that the man he wanted to talk with was Edward Hales, an old friend whom he had not seen for months. He directed a taxi to take him to St. George's Square.

Hales had been a don at Oxford, who, on inheriting a very small fortune, had come to London, where he could bury himself much more completely than in the University. He wanted above all not to be interfered with, but he also wanted to see life; and no gift of the gods or fairies would have pleased him better than an invisible cloak. He had let Stephen into the house himself, grumbling at the lateness of the hour.

"As if you ever went to bed," laughed Stephen. When he had resumed his pipe Hales leant back in a chair covered in worn leather and grunted once or twice. He was a tall man with a rugged face and red hair, with dark brown eyes that looked fagged but ready to be kindly or amused.

Stephen was sitting on the arm of a chair near him, smoking a cigarette, and absolutely at home.

"I have agreed to write Horace Blake's Life," he said.

"You—you whipper-snapper!" exclaimed Hales, not a little astonished.

"You can't be more amazed than I am," said Stephen.

"Well," said Hales, "because you wrote quite a thoroughly good life of a statesman, you are to have the dishing-up of Horace Blake. Why does n't the woman do it herself?" He gave three grunts, of which the first was the loudest and the third sounded like a big dog consenting to become quiet. Stephen did not answer.

"She won't," he said presently.

Hales looked intensely interested.

"It would be difficult for her, I admit."

"I have just been to see *Puritan Anne*," said Stephen.

"Curious you should mention that; I was thinking of it at the same moment. I wrote a play that failed just when *Puritan Anne* came out, and I knew something of the Blakes then. Nancy Potter acted it first, and she died that year. It was n't acted again for years. Blake would n't allow it, I believe. It was a grisly thing."

"It 's wonderful," said Stephen, gazing into the coals. "I can see nothing at this moment but that extraordinary scene when the man explains to Anne that he had never loved her, and she answers that she had never loved him—and yet——"

"I would n't have passed it had I been censor," said Hales.

Stephen stared at him.

"You!" he exclaimed in astonishment.

"It 's to me a thing entirely on the side of evil."

"Evil!" cried Stephen. "I think I never saw

anything that so brought home to me the horror of the loss of innocence. Again, in the next scene, how you feel what might have been in her 'good-bye' to the young minister."

"I think that 's the most devilish bit of all," said Hales irritably. "It 's a mockery of Christian repentance—the whole gist of that scene is to me abominable. It hints that the young minister himself had had no higher feelings for her than the seducer, that he is acting a part, is actually posing, showing himself off to the other characters."

"No, no," said Stephen. "He and Anne herself are to me the most exquisite figures. I can hear Horace Blake's voice in that young minister's part. I know Blake wrote queer things, and said queerer; but he had something curiously spiritual in him."

"There are divers kinds of spirits," said Hales. "I can't say you show the discernment thereof that was so much valued in the early centuries of the Christian era."

He laughed gruffly.

"You don't mean to say that you don't think the young minister a great character?"

"Dramatic talent is an odd thing," said Hales, "it constantly testifies against the dramatist's meaning. The evil of Blake's mind is over it all to me, and therefore I would have been the dourest censor of them all. At the same time I think the minister is a great creation—his creator insinuated things about him that I don't believe. Blake's great characters are so great that I don't listen to his own slandering of them. Sometimes he lets them have full play like Martindale in this last drama of his—for two acts or

more: and by that time he may sneer and insinuate, but it 's too late. Martindale is to me the type of the great just judge in modern literature; even Balzac in *L'Interdiction* gave us nothing greater. And then he sneers at him, belittles him as hard as he can in the two last scenes. But you can't conceive what the effect of Nancy Potter acting *Puritan Anne* had upon us nearly twenty years ago! The astounding pathos and reality of it. And yet he could not finish even that without the sneering, evil spirit waking up in him. 'Love you?—No: I wanted just as a study to see if I could make you fall!'

"'Love you?' she replies; 'I was dazzled by you; I loved you as I loved the world—to content all my penned-up ambitions; what *might* have been love in me would have been for the minister.'

"'I don't mind,' he answers. 'I 'm not jealous. I 've had all I wanted to study. I understand a woman's mind now, as I never hoped to understand it.'

"'It was vivisection,' she says in effect, 'and you have given me no anæsthetics.'

"'But I can make you well again. You will be great, famous——'

"'But I—I want to be good.'

"Who could ever forget Nancy Potter saying, 'But I—I want to be good?' And he answers: 'Go, to—go to God, then.'"

"After that, with all its truth, comes the scene with the minister that you dare to admire," cried Hales, standing up and leaning against the mantelpiece.

"The scene of exquisite repentance and hope and comfort, and the underlying suggestion that the minister is an ordinary animal posing as an angel.

I believe there were fearful rows about that scene. Nancy Potter refused twice to act it. But she was afraid of Blake, they all were, and once in the swing she made a marvellous thing of it. She seemed to fling back the insinuations and destroy them by the glorious simplicity of her attitude. Like the heroine's, it was her last utterance in public." To himself, and quite inaudibly, he muttered: "Her *confiteor* written for her by Horace Blake."

Hales had his eyes fixed on the bookcase opposite.

"I have all his plays there," he said. "I have just murdered one to you. I have no verbal memory, but they obsess me sometimes, and then I get a reaction. And you—you are going to write his Life!"

Stephen felt so extremely young and small.

"And what advice would you give me?"

"Don't."

Stephen looked at him blankly.

"But I have told Mrs. Blake I will."

Hales moved about his small room for some moments without speaking. Then he sat down and crossed his legs.

"Do, then," he said.

It seemed to Stephen that his friend was taking it all very lightly.

"I thought I 'd like to talk it over with you."

"No good," said Hales, and he slowly took up his pipe and stuffed it afresh. "I 'm sorry to say it 's two o'clock," he went on.

Stephen this time felt almost offended. He stood up; Hales obviously only wanted to get rid of him, or why refill his pipe if he were going to bed?

"I smoke in bed," Hales observed. "Stephen Tempest," he went on in a tired, uninterested manner,

"it 's Mrs. Blake's doing to give you this job—just do it as she wishes, work entirely with her. Don't heed outside talk—talk is never to be trusted. Follow on; she 's a remarkable woman, you can't go wrong with her. Yes, good-night; it is late."

Stephen went out, feeling a little damped.

For some time Hales stood smoking over the fire.

"If she wants Tempest to paint her devil as an angel of light, let him do it. It 's no business of mine. But what will she tell him to say or *not* to say about Nancy Potter?"

Stephen was not in the least affected by what he had been hearing. Hales was unfair to Blake. He did not understand that the insinuations he spoke of were in the minds of the meaner characters in the play. Hales took them as Blake's own meaning, which was ridiculous, but Stephen had not felt inclined to fight it out.

It soon became known that Stephen Tempest was commissioned to write Horace Blake's Life, and at once people began to talk to him about it. A group of men he knew were discussing the fact when he came into his club one evening.

"Tempest, is it true that Blake left a play?"

"I 've not got the papers yet, and when I do get them——"

He paused, and the man took the hint

"You can hardly exaggerate the importance of it," he said. "Blake had just got to a point where you could see that much more was coming."

"There 's a story that his mind was getting soft," said another.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Stephen.

"But I did n't know that you knew Blake so well, Tempest," said a writer of biography.

"I did n't know him at all until I went out to Brittany for a holiday."

"How did you like him?"

"Immensely—an extraordinary charm about him."

"He was always telling interviewers about his people," said the author; "but he gammoned them. He really never let anyone know much about himself. Did you know he was born a Catholic?"

"Not till just lately," said Stephen.

"His mother was Irish," said somebody else.

"She was n't, she was Scotch—a Highlander," corrected the author.

"And his father was a chemist in a village on the Cornish coast," chimed in an older man. "I saw him once in Bristol. A scientific sort of chemist, but I believe there was a shop. He married above him, but he was a refined old fellow of good descent and family, and might have done anything, but he was utterly unpractical. He wrote ballads."

"Yes, I knew about the father," said the author. "Blake used to talk to interviewers as if he had had a father of great force of character, stern and narrow—he used to say that Carlyle had set the fashion in fathers, and that it gave less trouble to follow the fashion than to produce another father. But the chemist was, in fact, gentle and kindly and utterly vague. He died when his son was a boy, and they sent Horace to a seminary and tried to make him a priest. You 'll have a difficult job, Tempest, but an uncommonly interesting one," he concluded.

IV

THIS IS MY GREAT CHANCE

"I THINK the old schoolroom would be the best," said Stephen. He held in his hands some very dirty yellow papers, tied in red tape.

"I wish you would spread them all out on the leads outside the window, and air them before you begin. Old papers are very dangerous. I knew of a man once who died of examining a box of old papers."

"Mother, you have had the most varied experience of deaths!"

"My dear, I am getting on for sixty. But just try how they smell."

Stephen raised a packet of letters to his nose.

"Stuffy, musty—nothing worse."

Mrs. Tempest went on knitting rapidly.

"I shall send up two trays, and you must spread them out to air by the window."

"Very well," said Stephen smiling; "and I may do what I like in the schoolroom, and no one will dust it or go into it?"

"No one shall go into it except when I am there myself to see that none of your papers are touched."

That was the limit of concession to which he could reach at present.

The schoolroom had a fine view of well-wooded country from the windows. It had been refurnished for his sister's benefit before she married, and was

comfortable, cool in the mornings, and gloriously distant from the rest of the house.

In it Stephen unpacked the two first tin boxes of letters and papers that Mrs. Blake had sent him. Before leaving London he had given up his rooms and had taken a flat to the north of the Park, some way off from anybody he knew; it would give him room for any amount of papers and undisturbed quiet to work at them. His mother had been delighted that he should first come to work at home for a few weeks.

"Not that I approve of Horace Blake for a moment," she had said, "but if you can't take a holiday this summer you might as well do your work here. I never would see or read one of his plays; they were too wicked."

"I think if you had read them—" ventured Stephen.

"Nothing would induce me to," said Mrs. Tempest. "Why should I?"

"To be able to judge of them, you know."

"Oh, I know what they were like perfectly well. I don't see why the man's Life should be written at all."

She had taken what seemed to Stephen a wholly unreasonable view of Mrs. Blake as a tiresome, restless woman who could n't let her husband be at peace in his grave. There was a twinkle in Mrs. Tempest's eyes when she expressed herself freely, but all the same she meant what she said.

Stephen, piling the letters in the schoolroom cupboards and drawers, did feel them a contrast to the school-books and copy-books and story-books that once filled those same shelves. There was hopeless confusion in the papers; letters of different years in a packet, marked with the same date in Horace's

writing. The first thing would be to try to make some sort of order in them.

"Washed off the wicked man's dust?" asked his mother as he came in very late for luncheon.

"He was n't a wicked man," said Stephen from the sideboard, where he was cutting cold ham. "His conversation was not always pretty, I believe, but by the time I knew him that was nearly all right."

"Do eat slowly," said Mrs. Tempest. "You eat much too quickly; the Tempests all eat too quickly."

"You don't understand, mother, what a chance this is for me. The other thing I wrote was for a series of statesmen's 'Lives,' and it did uncommonly well, but this——"

"There 's a wasp in the tart."

"—this is my great chance. Here is a genius, an astonishing genius, who is being mourned by the whole country."

Mrs. Tempest snorted a little to mark herself an exception to this universal grief.

"And I am to write the serious and official biography."

"Will they give you a free hand?"

"The arrangement is that I shall do what I like, with everything sent to me; but of course they will only send me what they want me to use."

"So they can suppress anything a little difficult without your being any the wiser?"

"If they like, certainly."

Stephen was becoming cross, and his mother knew it. When she went out for a pottering walk in the village she reflected that it would not be at all wise to make him feel that she was going to nag at him on this biography question. She was a woman of innumer-

able fears for those she loved. If Stephen had been thrown across any other family as he had been thrown across the Blakes she might have been unreasonably nervous, but there was some excuse for her to be alarmed at his devotion to the dramatist's widow, as that widow had a daughter who had nursed the dying man on a romantic foreign coast.

"I know he is in love with her," Mrs. Tempest told herself angrily; "and there is no marriage I should dislike more."

And so she made herself miserable while Stephen was dreaming far more of Horace than of his daughter. He took long walks in which he debated with himself as to the method and plan of his work: whether to read all the materials and get them into thorough order and then plan out the proportion to be given to different times of his life, or just to make a study of Blake's youth first and risk having to curtail it if it grew too large for the rest of the book. He settled on the latter plan, though he had qualms as to his own wisdom in doing it, but his courage failed at the enormous task of studying the mass of material that he would have to wade through before he put pen to paper. One would be dried up and choked before one began, he told himself. So he now put on one side all the packets of letters docketed with the dates from the year of Horace's birth until he was eighteen. First came letters from his mother to her sister when he was a child, and from his father to his grandmother. There were others, of course, but those were the most numerous and important. Both parents, he thought, had been cursed with too much imagination and in different ways with great fluency. Horace's mother was the more vehement in speech, and when things

went wrong, as they mostly seemed to do, she wrote outpourings to her sister. Someone had generally done very wrong, or she herself had been an absolute fool. She never blamed her husband for the constant breakdown of some grand plan to make money. Evidently she got a great deal of enjoyment out of life all the same. Stephen seemed to see her after some practical failure or other, when some forgotten bills had arrived unexpectedly, after abusing herself in a letter to her sister, turning with keen zest to little everyday joys. She adored her children, not anxiously as did Stephen's own mother, but with intense, unclouded joy. Horace looked "more like an angel than ever," and more "amusing when he was in a temper." His little sister had just backed him up in revolt against some rule, and they seemed exquisitely funny to the admiring parents. They became very living to Stephen, these lovely children with shining eyes, who went through outward vicissitudes of fortune without being aware of anything but happiness. To make them happy had been the great object, and it had been attained. Then, evidently, there was cause for pride in the children's precociousness. Neither Horace nor Mary had ever shown any inclination for scientific tastes; it was no use to try and make them collect specimens or develop powers of observation for anything but human nature and scenery. They lived from the first in a dreamland of their own, but they were very funny as mimics, and they wove history and life into the queer drama of their imagination. Their father, meanwhile, was making discoveries, and failing to secure the patents for some of them, or failing to get the others that were patented appreciated by the public. At last

he had opened an actual chemist's shop, and his wife wrote vehemently to her sister of the humiliations he was undergoing, and at the same time clearly made the children think it all vastly entertaining. Throughout, the elder Blake evidently spent a good deal of time in admiring his wife and making the children happy. It seemed to Stephen that storms had passed quickly in that household, and that there was something of warm human colouring in it all. He had pictures of the four—man, woman, boy, and girl—in long expeditions on the Cornish coast, healthy, loving, graceful; there was no taint of worldliness, no suspicion of vulgarity in the Blakes. They were practising Catholics, and evidently in their few fat years subscribed to keeping up the mission as well as helping the poor.

Stephen fell in love with this strange blend of the refined, cultivated scientist, with the chemist behind the counter, at evidently irregular hours.

Mr. Blake died when Horace was fifteen, and he was mourned with intensity. Then Mrs. Blake and Mary abandoned themselves to pious practices. At this time there began to be allusions to a subject hitherto almost ignored—the subject of education.

"Why he should go to school when he knows all they can teach him there, I don't know," wrote Mrs. Blake. But evidently she was protesting against pressure to which she ultimately gave in, and Horace was sent to a school in the North kept by some religious order. There was a photograph of Horace taken at that date. The face was long, the eyes, even in the commonplace, faded photograph, held Stephen, who

had looked into them so many years after. The hair wanted cutting.

"A little of Shelley, but not very much of him," muttered the biographer. "Blake was more of a human being than Shelley."

He did not seem to have been self-conscious then; that came soon afterwards. After leaving home he was miserable exceedingly. A rough attempt at a diary which began at school was now Stephen's chief help. The boys could not understand Horace; how should they? It was far too late to transplant him from the license of such a home to the atmosphere of discipline, of endless small rules which he could hardly have managed to keep if he had tried his best. Then the lessons were to him quite insufferably dull. The head-master wrote home that he was clever but inaccurate, careless, no good at his work. Apparently he was not bullied; he went his own way unless he was roused, when his temper and his tongue made those who had disturbed him repent pretty quickly. He never complained to his mother, and she was evidently determined to be optimistic as to his school-life. It seemed as if in the terrible grief of that year she could not face any other trouble. She was giving herself to the habits of a *dévote* without perhaps any vocation to be one. She had to be something intensely, and the want of balance had never been more dangerous. She clearly did not realise that Horace, hating his school-life, had begun to weary of the minute and incessant practices of devotion that came into the day's routine.

He came home at Christmas, determined for his mother's sake not to speak out. He was so thankful to be back that he was happy in everything and was

hardly oppressed by the fact that religion was the one topic that interested his mother. But in the summer holidays, difficulties began. He would not tell her what he suffered at school, as he knew that it would be unbearable to her, but he became irritable and morose. Mrs. Blake began to complain of him in letters to her sister, and Stephen felt furiously sorry for him when he read them. In the middle of the next winter the boy was very ill and was sent home. Mrs. Blake was aghast at his looks and not satisfied as to what had been done for him. She became very angry with the authorities of his school and assured her sister that never, never should he go there again. Her optimism having broken down, she wrote obviously exaggerated accounts of Horace's miseries from the first day he went to school. To make Horace well and happy became her only thought and her multiple devotions seemed to fall off rather easily. Horace had not been without his admirers among the schoolboys, and he now amused himself by writing for their benefit, poems and plays, dramatising the "infernal regions" from which he had escaped. It seemed to Stephen that there was very great power in one or two of these. The boys returned them by request, with chortlings and chucklings of delight very queerly expressed. Horace was sixteen and a half when he left school. At eighteen he gained a history scholarship—the only academic distinction he ever achieved—and went to Oxford. With no connections in the University, with barely enough to pay his way, with no friends coming up from other schools, he yet made his own circle very quickly. His "queer mug," as the boys at school had called it, had instantaneous attraction for some sort of men. Appreciation of Horace Blake

was like a peculiar taste in wines or in cigars. Very different men shared it, but not a large number taken altogether. Those who did were rather proud of their discernment later in life.

V

DON'T SAY POOR FRANCE

THE sacristan at St. Jean des Pluies had set herself against the doctor in the matter of an operation on M. le Curé. She shook her head when the *sous-vicaire* told her that it had gone off splendidly. The *vicaire* and the *sous-vicaire*, being men, were quite satisfied at the excellent reports from the Hospice for the clergy, where they had taken the poor, good, too-confiding man. The only person who sympathised with the sacristan was the little old priest who had aggravated her for so long. *Le tout petit* in his absent-minded, fumbling attitude, with his fine, white, silky hair shining in the sun, stood one morning at the sacristan's door.

"He is not so well," he said.

"Of course not," said the sacristan sharply.

"I wish," said the old priest, "I have always wished, that he had refused to undergo this operation."

"Ah! mais Monsieur l'Abbé a joliment raison," said the sacristan.

And from that moment she softened perceptibly to the old priest, who had hitherto seemed to her nothing but a futile encumbrance who did not realise his own uselessness. She had soon nothing to say in the confessional about her wicked feelings as to one whom she ought to respect.

The *curé* came back, having made a wonderful recovery, but it soon became evident that he must be

in future a complete invalid. He did not at once tell them that he could be a parish priest no longer; he could not damp the delight with which they had received him back. He went about very slowly through the village, giving and receiving greetings, asking after each person's health and troubles and affairs with extraordinary gentleness and tact, always with a touch of reserve, and words that were not important in themselves. The tall, upright figure, with the weather-beaten face, carrying its secrets of spiritual peace and physical suffering, seemed to create its own atmosphere as it passed through the groups in the little market-place under the big cross. One day he stood in the sacristan's doorway, filling up vastly more of the space than was taken up by *le tout petit.* The sacristan, mournfully tender, but also somewhat official in aspect, put forward the old arm-chair which had been her father's.

"Il fait beau temps," said the *curé*, also a little official in his manner to the sacristan. Presently she asked how he found himself.

"Comme ci, comme ça," he said, balancing his outstretched hand, as if the thumb and the little finger were the extreme ends of the scales. He valued the sacristan very highly—a discreet woman, he always said, which was, from him, enthusiastic praise.

"M. le Vicaire does all the work," the *curé* went on.

"He does very well," said the sacristan as if giving in a report to a superior official. "He gets older," she went on, "that was all he wanted."

"Précisément," said the *curé*. They were both thinking of a moment at which the *vicaire* had shown himself distinctly too young.

"He will do well now; these last months he has had much to do."

"He does very well," repeated the sacristan.

Then the *curé* changed the conversation, and among other things they spoke of Trix Blake. She had written twice to the *curé* and once to the sacristan. She had sent the *curé* an enormous photograph of her father, and to the sacristan she had sent a fine Scotch shawl.

"Has she become a Catholic yet?" The sacristan asked her question with just a touch of sharpness. She could not understand why the *curé* had not received the poor child while she was in such excellent dispositions.

"No," said the *curé* with all his gentle reserve to the fore. "No, not yet."

Then they spoke of how the new *Maire* came to Mass on Sundays.

"That produces the most excellent effect," said the sacristan.

Presently he went away with some little joke about the cat. The sacristan sat down and cried for a long time. The *curé* had in that short visit resigned his position as parish priest and had appointed M. le Vicaire. He and she had come to that decision. Bishops might nominate, parishioners have their views, but the matter was really settled. It would not be so peaceful for the sacristan in future as it had been for the last thirty years.

Then *le tout petit* went away for a week's retreat, and he came after that to the sacristan's house, looking more alert than she had ever seen him.

Almost at once he said:

"He is weaker."

"Yes, he is weaker," said the sacristan.

"I saw the bishop," said *le tout petit.*

The sacristan put forward her father's chair.

"M. le Curé has sent in his resignation," said *le tout petit.*

"I knew it," said the sacristan.

"You are discreet."

"All the world knows that,"—the sharp features looked a little sharper.

"Of whom else can I ask this question?" said the priest as if to himself. "Tiens! here it is. Tell me what is this story of the *vicaire* and the police."

"They have got hold of that, have they?"

"The bishop has always been kind to me," said *le tout petit*, to whom everybody had not always been kind. "He talked touchingly of M. le Curé. Then he felt his way with me as to the *vicaire.* I saw he hesitated. I told him that the *vicaire* is admirable, is beloved. 'So much discretion is needed in these days,' said the bishop." He paused.

The sacristan's acute eyes pierced him like gimlets.

"He thinks highly of the second *vicaire*—a man of weight, of discretion."

"But that would never do," cried the sacristan. "He is learned, correct," she went on, "but never would he understand the people here."

"It ought not to be," said the little man excitedly. "To send the *vicaire* away from here would do great harm to the cause of religion. Besides, what have they against him? What is this about the police?"

"It is simply this," said the sacristan. "There was a man here—a bad man, who drank and was wicked. His poor wife was half-starved and feeble. One day the *vicaire* found him in the act of beating his wife, so

the *vicaire* just beat him. He was strong, but the *vicaire* was so angry he had plenty of force in his fists."

"Tiens! quel histoire!" cried *le tout petit*, all aghast.

"The man had the *vicaire* up for assault, and every paper in France had paragraphs about this murderous *vicaire*. When it came to the trial, the *vicaire* said exactly what he had done, whereupon the man said that the *vicaire* had been too attentive to his wife and she got frightened and said that all her husband said was true. Everyone in this country knew it was all wicked lies, but it did harm all over France, I have been told."

"Bishops naturally don't like such incidents."

"The *vicaire* got a slight fine, but everyone here was with him. The wicked man and his wife had to leave the village, the people made it too hot for them. But it was twelve or fifteen years ago."

She was frowning with her effort to remember the exact date.

"Who has talked to this new bishop about it?"

"Somebody from here," said *le tout petit*, "and it is a thousand pities."

The sacristan ran her eyes over the village, as it were, and discovered no one. Then she flushed a deep red.

"M. le Sous-Vicaire made his retreat the week before you, M. l'Abbé."

Le tout petit took his breviary out of his pocket and then moved it from one hand to the other.

"A good man," he said, "but too severe, too correct. I 'm afraid he did make his retreat the week before me."

The sacristan looked very dark indeed.

"That one is ambitious," thought she to herself. "Well, he may be made a bishop, an archbishop, a

Pope, for all I care, but he shall not be *curé* of St. Jean des Pluies."

It was a very painful moment of disillusion for the sacristan. It was a shock to her faith in clerical human nature.

After all, what had passed between the bishop and the *sous-vicaire* had been very little. It was only that the bishop, in the garden of the *Evêché*—a wretched, modern house which had been chosen on account of its low rent—walking on the burnt grass so as to keep in the shadow of the building, had given the *sous-vicaire* the opportunity of talking to the *vicaire*.

"A zealous, indiscreet, rough peasant, who had once got into trouble with the police." Not a word said had been untrue. The *sous-vicaire* thought he had spoken handsomely of his *confrêre* whom he tried not to dislike.

To the amazement of *le tout petit*, who had only consulted the sacristan as a discreet woman who would tell him the facts and let him know what was thought of them in the village, that official said calmly:

"The time has come when I must speak to the bishop myself."

Le tout petit looked a little dazed at this announcement; his breviary slipped on to the floor. He stooped to pick it up and his face was flushed.

"I will not say that you spoke to me," she said reassuringly, but with perhaps a tinge of contempt.

The old priest went away, feeling that he had called greater forces into action than he had at all intended.

Then he went and sat by M. le Curé in the garden of the presbytery, looking no more alive than usual. They spoke a little, and then read their breviaries—

le tout petit closed his some minutes after the *curé* had put his own in his pocket.

"It is curious how some good men are ambitious," he said hesitatingly.

"It is sometimes that they know they have powers to use for God, and want to use them."

"But if it makes them do wrong?"

"Human nature is complicated, and the devil exhibits his finest skill in dealing with the good. He has a genius for producing quarrels, jealousies, wraths, between the good."

The *curé's* mind had gone back to various things that had shocked him in his seminary experience.

"It is amazing," he said, "the misunderstandings, the hurt feelings, the sufferings of those who are trying to be good."

He broke off and became quite silent.

The sacristan had never had the heart to go on a journey since her sister's death. She knew she would not enjoy it, and besides, her sister had had courage for two and she herself was nervous on the railroad. So there was great astonishment when the sacristan, having obtained permission for a holiday to visit some relations, and having arranged for sufficient attention to her cat, locked the door of her house in sight of the village and walked off. She went in her Breton cap, wearing her large shawl, with a big brown basket and a sturdy umbrella in her hands. The folds of her blue stuff skirt hid her leanness, and her black apron was neatly fastened on her flat, narrow chest. The sharp, determined features relaxed a little as she passed the presbytery garden. She was amused in the train by a little cheery soldier who talked to her

about his mother and who sang an interminable ballad when conversation failed. She was very tired when she arrived at her cousin's house, and was hospitably received and made to rest and take coffee.

She was a little grand, perhaps, with the cousin, who was inclined to be humble, and she condescended to enjoy the baby's conversation, but she soon said she she must go out to the *Evêché*. She had started from home very early, and it was only two o'clock when she asked at his door if she might see Monseigneur. The last time she had been in the cathedral town Monseigneur, the bishop then living, had inhabited the real grand *Evêché* close to the cathedral, with its fine garden and its magnificent view of the surrounding country. The real *Evêché* was now shut up by the Government, the garden walks were grass-grown, hardly anything was in flower, a window broken here and there, the door was stained with wet, and the old iron gate rusty. The present building had certainly nothing pretentious about its square, bald ugliness, and the garden, mon Dieu! was no garden at all.

The bishop was a man of whom many were to hear later on. He was at present only at the first stages of undertaking more work than he could possibly achieve. He was considered a dangerous man already by the Government, and there had been rumours since he was made bishop that he was not absolutely orthodox. But five years later, when he died of overwork and strain, they all knew what manner of man they had lost. From the first to the last he was an optimist. He would not croak himself nor allow others to croak. In his worn cassock, in his barely-furnished study, or in the garden that was not a garden, he looked as if he were sure of some success, some conquest to be

achieved. In the retreats in his house no groans were heard over the hopeless state of poor France, no prophecies of the terrible punishments that must await the persecutors of the Church. The weak-kneed grew stalwart in his company, he taught confidence in action, courage—all things work together for good, he would say. He would join no political party, put no faith in dreams; he was not anxious about his own reputation for orthodoxy, he was too thoroughly sure of himself on that point. His priests adored him, each one saying as *le tout petit* said: "He has always been kind to me."

Of course he would see the sacristan from St. Jean des Pluies, although he was struggling with a document from Paris bursting with cold, official tyranny, and insolence. He knew something of the sacristan by reputation. The sacristan was not the least nervous. If he were in command in that diocese, she was also an official of much longer standing than he was. The face at which she looked was a strong one, not subtle, not as spiritual, perhaps, at first sight, as that of some priests she had known. He soon inquired after M. le Curé, and she said, "He is getting weaker; he has been sinking ever since his operation." Evidently the operation was not approved by this decided little woman.

"He will have a grand account up there," said Monseigneur.

"I have been thirty years sacristan at St. Jean des Pluies. I am only half a sacristan now, for we did it between us, my sister and I, but we were a very good sacristan for a quarter of a century. I know St. Jean des Pluies comme ma poche, Monseigneur."

"No doubt of it," said the bishop kindly.

"The people of St. Jean des Pluies can be influenced, can be led by anybody they love, Monseigneur. Now the *vicaire* can do anything with them." She paused and coughed.

The bishop understood and was touched, and also, possibly, amused.

"That *vicaire*," she proceeded, "is the sort of shepherd who would give his life for his sheep, for any one of them. He was young, too young once, Monseigneur, but he is steady now, he would not now forget himself in his zeal." She thus skated lightly over the delicate subject. "I wish you could hear him preach, Monseigneur, the men come to listen to that one."

"You have more than one good preacher," said the bishop.

"Ah, Monseigneur means M. Didon—*'le tout petit'* we call him—a gentle soul, does no harm to anybody." She calmly ignored the *sous-vicaire*, and the bishop saw through her diplomacy.

"The *vicaire* only the other day converted a freemason—a terrible man—and he left his money to the Church."

"I hope he had no family then," said the bishop dryly.

"There was enough money for everybody," she hastened to reassure him.

"If a child dies, if a fisherman is missing when the boats come back in the autumn, it is only the *vicaire* who can give comfort."

"And when he was too young," said the bishop; "was that very long ago?"

"Yes, that was quite fifteen years ago. Monseigneur, he had a warm heart and M. le Curé loved him from the first, but he could not bear to see cruelty.

There was a very bad man and he beat his wife, and the *vicaire*, Monseigneur, quite without previous intention, beat the bad man."

"Good sound blows?" asked the bishop.

"He was very angry, Monseigneur," and she proceeded to tell the story as she had told it to *le tout petit*. When she had concluded the bishop said:

"Well, I am very glad you feel like that. Yesterday I appointed your *vicaire* in succession to the *curé*. I am glad that he will have the support of the sacristan; it is so important for a priest. And now remember, if he does not always please you, he was your own choice and put up with him."

The sacristan cared far too much for her cause to regret that she had taken a journey for nothing.

The bishop said suddenly:

"And do you pray for me?"

"Sometimes," said the truthful sacristan.

"Do it every day," he said earnestly. "I need it; and you pray for France?"

"Ah, for poor France, but yes!"

"Don't say 'poor France,'" said the bishop. "Say 'glorious France,' where the battle forces of good and evil are at their hottest and fiercest, and where the good will triumph—after you and I are gone."

The sacristan never told them in St. Jean des Pluies why she had been to see her relations—she just beamed at *le tout petit* and said, "It was all settled before I got there," with the air of a St. Paul whose visit had proved unnecessary for putting one special thing in order.

Presently came the official announcement. M. le Curé was to retire and repose himself after his many labours. M. le Vicaire was to replace him. M. le

Sous-Vicaire was appointed *vicaire* in a town parish, and *le tout petit* was actually to take his place at St. Jean des Pluies. *Le tout petit* brightened exceedingly at this most unconventional arrangement; he was determined to show the bishop that he was right in supposing that he had work left in him still. He who had been a *curé* himself! The sacristan was almost shocked, but being a Christian as well as a sacristan, she decided to be edified instead.

VI

LET ME GO TO BRITTANY

ANNE CONISTON was getting out of all patience with Trix. Trix was behaving as if she were absolutely broken-hearted, as if she felt her life to be over. Was it possible that Horace Blake's death could really be such a crushing blow to the girl who had barely known him six months before? Trix was, her aunt decided, evidently interested in her own *rôle* of mourner; if she really felt so much she was very ready to let other people see it; there was no reserve or restraint about it.

They had left Wimbledon, and were staying in Anne's little cottage.

"I don't think you quite see what a shock it has all been to her nerves," said Kate.

"Oh, I quite see that," said Anne; "but what provokes me is this air of being the only person who understood her father. More than once she has quoted Horace's opinions in contradiction to something you have said."

"I know," said Kate, "and of course she will always take the things he said to those priests as of supreme importance."

"I suppose the poison in his system did affect the brain a little," said Anne tentatively. They had not talked as intimately as this since the day when Kate had told her that Horace had received sentence of condemnation.

"I think," said Kate, "that the effort he made to write the last act of the play was too much for him. This religious nonsense began directly after that. I wonder what these good folk would think of his piety if they could read this play! I can't help being glad that it was written at St. Jean des Pluies, and so near the end. The priests over there made no crowing at having got him; I think they knew that this would be a doubtful conversion to boast of."

Anne suppressed some remark as to Horace that nearly rose to her lips.

"Kate," she said abruptly, "have you made any plans about Trix?"

Kate came back from the thoughts of Horace and blushed.

"She is nearly eighteen," said Anne. "I can't say that at present I see any prospect of her attempting to be any comfort to you."

"However much she attempted to be that she could hardly succeed," said Kate sadly.

"I will keep her here if that would be the least help," said Anne.

"I would far rather have her with me,"—and then, after a hesitation: "Anne, does it not seem a little hard that the poor child's one idea of me is that as a mother I am a complete failure? If I had foreseen all the torture she would cause me, I wonder if I could have done it." Then with a wan smile, "Yes, I would have done it, anyhow."

"I am not sure it was right," said Anne.

"Nor am I," faltered Kate; "and what is hard on the child now is that we blame her for not being a daughter to me when I have been no mother to her."

Anne was silent. She was hurt on her own account



both with Trix and with Kate. She seemed to come in very little after the years in which she had brought up Trix.

"It is a false position," said Anne, "and I want you to consider now whether it would not be far better to let her know the truth. She takes everything as her right; she does nothing for you; she resents my authority in the smallest things. Besides, she is only waiting to become a Roman Catholic. She is not the same girl who left me to go abroad with her father."

"She is such a child," said Kate. "I shall give her three hundred a year from the time she is twenty-one, and she can make a life of her own if she wants to."

Anne had been profoundly irritated by the situation for a long time past; she made an effort not to speak harshly.

"I don't know how the next three years will be passed," she said.

"I must do the best I can," said Kate simply. "And you, Anne, have done far, far too much already. I can never, never be thankful enough to you for that."

"No, I have n't," said Anne, mollified; "but I think it is very hard that you and I cannot live together without Trix, and it would be a mistake for us to live all three in the same house."

Kate had never thought of living with her sister; she longed to be quite alone.

"I must be in London for some time," she said, "and Trix can live with me. She will soon make her own friends and go her own way."

That same day Kate was made more acutely aware of Trix's state of mind than she had hitherto been. The widow had been far too much absorbed to notice

many things that exasperated Anne. It was greatly Anne's incapacity for any sympathetic feeling for Trix at the time of her father's death that had shut the child up in herself and made her morbid. Trix was fond of Aunt Anne and had taken for granted that she would be sympathetic; but when Anne came out to St. Jean des Pluies she had been entirely unresponsive as to what Trix wanted to tell her about her father. Anne's one thought had been for Kate.

It was only Stephen Tempest who had allowed Trix the relief of telling her story. Since going back to the cottage she had been writing a great deal on authors' pads in her own room, and Anne half suspected what she was doing—she was writing a complete account of her father's last days at St. Jean des Pluies. She would come to meals with the tears on her cheeks, and refuse to eat more than green vegetables and to drink anything but black coffee. She had resented Anne's authority after this interlude and seemed really hurt if she insisted on proper food and exercise. Anne had a vague notion that Trix's writing on authors' pads was a kind of legendary account of a holy man's death, and she was not far out in this idea; but she did not know that Trix had inherited quite enough talent for it to be so far true and beautiful that it could never be quite ignored by any student of Blake's life in the future.

It was after tea on the same day on which Anne had pressed the question of Trix's future on Kate's attention. Anne had gone out and Kate and Trix were alone in the little sitting-room of the cottage. Anne and Trix had snapped at one another more than once during tea. Kate had never snapped in her life, she could have given no canine sound smaller than a deep

growl. When they were alone Trix, with a flushed face, spoke suddenly:

"Aunt Anne won't want me to live here any more."

Kate leaned back in her chair with the calm of one who had been in straits half her life and does not expect anything smooth or easy to come in her way.

"If you come to London with me in October you could finish your education by getting lessons there."

"May I say what I want to do?" said Trix, evidently on the verge of tears.

"Of course."

"I want you to let me go back to St. Jean des Pluies. They would take me for five francs a day, and there is an old English lady going to spend the winter there who would chaperon me. The manageress says she is of a good English family. Then I could learn French, and I—I believe—" she stammered, "that I am going to be able to write books and—and"—defiantly—"I could visit father's grave."

This seemed intolerable to Kate, especially that last touch. Trix was so tragically possessive of Horace, and though it was too pathetic for it to excite Kate's anger as it did Anne's, it added to the difficulties of the false position they lived in.

Trix began to cry.

"You don't want me, I know; but you want me to be respectable in the world's eyes——"

Kate gave a start.

"—and I know you mean to be kind. Oh, why not let me go to St. Jean des Pluies?"

Kate took a moment for thought.

"Trix," she said earnestly, "Anne knows how much I want to keep you. But, anyhow, there is one thing that you and I wish to do more than anything else,

and that is what your father would have wished. I am convinced that he would have wished you to be with me all this first year after his death; he would not have wished you to be at an hotel under the care of a chaperon found by the manageress. I am sorry to refuse this, dear child, but I can only do what I see is right."

The generous side in Trix was reached.

"I suppose you are right."

It was a great effort to give up that darling scheme of getting back to St. Jean des Pluies.

"I think you will write well," said Mrs. Blake kindly. "It is so likely that you should inherit the power. I should like you to have some good courses in literature. We might ask Mr. Tempest to advise us about that."

Trix looked brighter. She had not expected her mother to take any interest in this question of her writing.



VII

IS THIS HORACE BLAKE?

IT was magnificent September weather, and Trix took her solitary little self out walking constantly. She did not write for many hours at a time, and often when Anne thought she was shut up in her room, she had run out unnoticed and was pacing up and down one of the grass roads on the common.

There she could dream of her father and Stephen Tempest, walking with them in the sunset at St. Jean des Pluies. Her nerves, as Kate said, were still suffering from the strain she had undergone, but her imagination was in a stage of immense development. Such a combination of age and circumstances would have brought some expansion in any girl, but in Trix there was the hereditary gift ready to develop with alarming rapidity.

Anne had very little imagination, and this new Trix was exasperating to the woman who thought she had moulded the former Trix in a shape that would be durable.

Trix dreamed of the day at St. Jean des Pluies when she would become a Catholic, and be united more closely to her father; she prayed to him that the intervening time would be short. Hers was not the close hungry sorrow of a child who has been brought up at a parent's knee; it was more romantic than domestic, to put it crudely, and yet it included the almost maternal yearning after what had been in her

care, what had needed her love and her patience; nobody needed her now.

She would pace up and down a long stretch of soft turf just in the shade of the rough oaks whose acorns fell with a thud on the bare ground beneath. She would stop sometimes just to listen to them falling, thud, thud, almost as if the heart of the oak had gone throb, throb. Sometimes she felt suddenly as if she could not endure the sound; it was so extraordinarily lonely and with something imperious in its detachment. There was some mysterious intercourse between the oak-tree and the earth, a sense of law and fate shared between them. Through the centuries the acorns had fallen thud, thud, on the earth, their time of individual life being accomplished; and through the ages men had gone down into the earth, and thud, thud, had come the spadefuls of earth to cover them up. Only, thought Trix, looking up at the lightness of the blue sky, Christianity had defeated the treason that the oaks and the earth muttered in their intercourse. Immortality was Trix's new secret; that was her horizon now—the infinite. She had come late into her human heritage, but with a full consciousness. It was astonishing to her that it did not break out from her and show itself. But she was hungry for the people in whose eyes she could see the new knowledge reflected.

It was the first time that she had written anything, and in Trix such writing was utterly genuine. It gave a sense of expansion, of new powers, and the power was really there. In itself it was a strain, this new work, though she did not know it. One day she suddenly came to an end. She had planned nothing, but she had vaguely in her mind that, after the narrative of her

father's funeral, she would have things to say of her own, and that she would show how strangely in the trumpeting of his fame, the sweet, low notes of his meekness, his gentleness, and his suffering had been drowned. But the artist in her suddenly found that she must come to an end with the last verse of the *Benedictus* sung out by the open grave to the sea and the sky, by the *vicaire* and four choir-boys and five old women.

She copied it out twice, and then, without serious misgiving, posted one of the copies to Stephen Tempest.

Stephen began to read the MS. in an attitude of affectionate indulgence. There was something childish in the handwriting, and occasionally in the style. Then he began to read quicker, not dwelling on details, and presently he could hardly get to the end, he was so profoundly touched. The amazing simplicity of narrative corresponded to the amazing simplicity of her outlook on life. It was a child talking of eternal things; it had the pity and the love of a spirit just coming into touch with human life. He read it over again at once. She had woven into her story bright passages of her father's remembrances of his childhood, of his talk of his sister Mary, of their reading the books he had read with her, which, to Stephen, sitting among the stale yellow letters telling of the same childhood were extraordinarily pathetic. The paper undoubtedly showed the touch of genius, though he did not conclude that Trix was necessarily gifted with genius. He understood how the sudden expansion in her life, the intercourse with her father, his sufferings, his death, had developed

her until she had like a plant been brought to flower before the natural time.

He gave it to his mother, who cried over it, while her mouth never lost an expression of extreme obstinacy. Stephen knew that she would not own to its having altered her feeling as to Horace Blake and his biography in the least.

This paper of Trix's gave a great spurt to Stephen's work; it was very curious that he had the beginning and the end of Horace's life already so vividly before him —the morning and the evening, surely those two made great part of one day.

He wrote really well of Horace's childhood under this stimulus, though he groaned in despair at the hopelessness of rivalling Trix's picture. He intended that hers should be the last chapter in his book. Far too true an artist to be jealous of yielding her the last and most important bit of the whole work, he simply rejoiced in the thought of this exquisitely simple conclusion. It would be in his mind all the way through; it would be the clear note with which nothing must jar, though much might be in dramatic contrast.

He knew that in his mother's mind was the amazed question: Could this be Horace Blake—the author of all the horrid plays she had refused to see or to read? Yes, that was what he meant to show. The critics, the public, had misunderstood Blake's work. He had been mocking at false religiosity, not at true religion; at prudery, not at goodness; he had felt half maddened at the hideous unreality of European civilisation. He had meant to make men feel the utter need of the things he would not mention in the same context with the lies he was exploding, because they must come as a still voice to each man's own heart. He had disliked

the idea that Blake had fallen under priestly wiles, but Trix's picture showed no servile superstitious terrors, nothing but what was exquisite. And it came to him that it was in the religion of this simple peasantry that Blake had recognised the spiritual simplicity, the exquisite note of goodness without show or convention. He had gone from the corrupt world he had jeered at to die where there was no greed for gold, no lust, no selfishness masquerading as piety, as propriety, as patriotism. That idea was the thread with which Stephen meant to draw together the childhood and the last days.

VIII

THE MORNING AND THE EVENING

STEPHEN had been surprised at the degree of intimacy between Mrs. Blake and the George Shenstones when he had heard that they had lent her their house at Wimbledon directly after her husband's death. He had met Mrs. Shenstone several times, and had been equally impressed by the beauty of her jewels and the entire failure of her wig. Surely the art of wig-making had advanced beyond this, of late years, in the power of deception? But Mrs. Shenstone, with rather juvenile gowns of extremely expensive effect, and a complexion that must have received considerable care, cheerfully wore a chestnut wig, that lay in bold, hard lines against her forehead. The mystery of it grew upon him, the mystery of economy in just that one and most essential article, the wig, whereas she wore fortunes in the shape of diamonds and pearls and all manner of stones, and a large income must have been spent on her dressmaker. Her conversation was divided between very ordinary rather shrewd gossip, discussion as to where to get things, and little outbreaks of condemnation of certain gross forms of vice. Her husband, silent, handsome, and distinguished, was seldom with her, but it seemed that he was most solicitous of her health and rather strict with her on the score of carefulness. He was in the City, and very busy.

Stephen had a notion that she must have been gay

fairly recently, and that having been obliged to take to a wig young, she had reminiscences attaching to this particular kind of wig which prevented her from improving upon it. But that, he knew, was only a silly fancy. The thing he wanted to understand was why Mrs. George Shenstone should throw herself into Mrs. Blake's life, and how she secured her position in it. It was impossible to explain; but he supposed that the love of famous people had been a new fancy with the wealthy lady, and that through a rather varied existence she had not reached middle life without some knowledge of how to treat with her fellow-creatures. Anyhow, she had, it seemed, succeeded, and the villa at Wimbledon had been the refuge of the newspaper-hunted widow.

These queries and wonderings had been revived in Stephen soon after he received Trix's paper by a letter from Mrs. George Shenstone. Mrs. Shenstone wrote to ask him to stay with her in the Highlands, where they had taken a hunting-lodge.

"I had hoped," she wrote, "to have had Mrs. Blake here; it would have done her so much good, but she won't stay with any friends at present. I have persuaded her to send me little Trix, as the child is not very well and needs a change."

Stephen particularly wanted to see Trix, and to talk quietly about her father. He felt at once that it would be far better to talk to Trix and to Mrs. Blake when they were quite apart. If he saw them together, or even were liable to one interrupting him in a talk with the other, it would be impossible to get from them all that he wanted.

It occurred to Stephen on his journey north that the wig would be symbolical of Mrs. Shenstone's treat-

ment of the Highlands, and when she gave him tea in a room that might have been a London drawing-room, he saw that he was right. Mrs. Shenstone was not glaringly vulgar, nor markedly solicitous as to the things which make people snobs; she was only openly attached to certain artificialities that most people like to take in a more disguised form.

When Stephen arrived his hostess was in a turquoise-blue tea-gown, and was talking to Trix about manicuring. Outside, the glory of the evening was shining on golden trees and purple hillsides. Trix, occasionally answering "yes" or "of course" or "exactly" in fairly appropriate places while her eyes were drinking in what she could see outside, had been sitting in the window until Stephen was announced. She was dressed in a plain black skirt and a white flannel shirt. As soon as he had greeted Mrs. Shenstone, Trix came towards him and then sat down in a deep chair near the tea-table. Something rose in his throat as he watched her, she was so slight and delicate; she lay back as if she were tired, and her small, white hand rested on the head of a spaniel that was curled up on a cushion close to her.

He hardly got a word with her that evening. When the room filled up with large sportsmen and two other ladies, in the latest thing in garments specially designed for the Highlands, Trix slipped away. At dinner he was far from her, but it seemed to him that she barely spoke to her neighbours, and when the men came out of the dining-room she had already gone to bed.

"I don't try to keep her," said Mrs. Shenstone; "she is not very well, and has never been up late at

night. I am not going to oblige her to be a grown-up young lady here."

"The morning and the evening surely make one day."

Stephen was sitting on one lump of granite on a sharp descent of the hillside a few feet from Trix, seated on another. He had been telling Trix about her father's childhood, and she held in her hand the letter in which her grandmother had written of him as so angelic and so deliciously and exquisitely naughty.

Trix's eyes were soft and large as she lifted her head to glance at Stephen. The passion of the past was strong in her just then, and aided by Stephen she was living in that childhood only unlike some other childhoods by the simplicity of its setting.

"How delicious those two children must have been," cried Trix. "How I wish I could have seen them."

Then Stephen brought out of a carefully-guarded pocket-book a little water-colour sketch of the two children, Horace and Mary, sitting on a low rock by the sea. It was quite amateur in quality but not altogether weak, and it had a certain truthfulness which is rare without more advanced workmanship. The colour was light and fresh, and the sea-breezes not badly indicated by the disorder of the gold and brown locks of the boy and girl.

"One can see that it is father," said Trix.

They were silent for a moment as they sat looking down into the loch very far below them, where some water-fowl were splashing the water gently as a happy accompaniment to the sweet silence about them.

"The morning and the evening surely make one

day. That is the note I wish to strike," Stephen said, and it pleased her very much. "In the drawing he is little more than a baby, but now look at this poor sort of photograph. Are not the eyes speaking? Oh! I am sorry"—for the expression in the eyes had brought to Trix's own a few clear, large tears.

"No, no," she said. "I love to look at it."

"I shall construct my biography, as far as I can see it now, on that thread. The idea of a very gifted and spiritual nature starting in the light of happiness and common human goodness, then the fight with the world's shams, and then peace in the evening. I know," he went on, "that many people will take his life at once from a different point of view altogether."

Trix's head gave a sad and experienced nod of acquiescence.

"It will seem to them," said Stephen, "that he began in the midst of silly and objectionable superstitions from which he escaped to play the man, and that in sickness and weakness he was caught again by the priests from whom he had escaped."

"That will be mother's view," said Trix in a very low voice and a rather bitter accent. A dark shadow clouded her face.

"But we know better," said Stephen, "and, after all, she only wants to have the truth."

"She thinks she only wants the truth," Trix answered.

"You see," said Stephen, "my view is a far clearer one, and it explains so much that cannot be explained in any other way except by a theory of brain-collapse of which there is no proof. There is no proof of that except his turning to religion in the end, so they get into a vicious circle; they explain his religion by a

brain-collapse, and prove the brain-collapse on the score that he took to religion."

"Exactly," cried Trix eagerly.

"Well, then, what I believe is that he was much more consistent throughout. He was against shams from the first, he was bored by silly, superstitious devotions at school, he tilted against both social and religious and academical shams at Oxford, but I can't see that he ever tilted against a truly spiritual view of religion throughout. Then when he was in Brittany and in want of help he found the very simplest of spiritual men ready for his needs, and in the evening there was the same light that had shone in the early morning."

"He was always going back to his childhood in those last weeks and to his sister Mary," said Trix, giving her corroborating evidence.

"Of course it is easier for you to see it simply," said Stephen, "than it would be for Mrs. Blake, because he must have been through some stormy times in his crusade against the shams of the world. And I suppose that to her his first religious ideas were simply an absurdity."

"I can quite see," said Trix, "how she might take his attacks on the silly things in religion as going much deeper than they really did. She was brought up an agnostic."

"I won't ask you to read the plays," said Stephen, "because he did not want you to read them, but I wish you could, so that you could tell me if you agree with me that they don't in fact upset my theory. I think he was on the side of the real angels, and only showing up the false ones."

"But I had better do just what he wished," said Trix with a deep blush.

That evening they were alone together again. They had escaped from the long, large men, tired with deer-stalking, who were looking at the City news in the papers that had arrived by the afternoon post. Mrs. Shenstone and the two other women were doing the same.

"I wish I understood investments," said Trix as they walked off along the garden-path, "it is all Greek to me."

"For Heaven's sake don't let us give it a thought," cried Stephen, "in the very face of these flowers too!"

Much may be done in autumn gardening in the south, but no art will ever get the peculiar glory of colour that can be got in the Highlands. Cardinal lobelias, deepest blue salvias, dahlias, out on their own, wild and spoilt children, and travellers' joy, that was crept over by the most wilful of climbers, the flame nasturtium. They had gone back, those garden flowers, into more simple forms of growth while they glowed as no dainty greenhouse beauties could glow in comparison.

"In England our flowers would run to seed and to weeds if they tried to behave like that," said Trix.

The loch lay before them, tapering away between heather-clad hills, and the sun sank just to the right of a very small ruined castle, that had but a streak of shore to divide its grim walls from the shining water.

"Are many country-house parties like this?" asked Trix, as they walked through the midst of the flowers, to find an open spot from which they might watch the sunset.

"Oh! I hope and trust not," cried Stephen.

"Do they enjoy anything at all?" she asked.

"I think the men enjoy feeling better in their

insides; you see they eat and drink so much at home—it is the only pleasure they have time for."

"They can't eat and drink more at home than they do here," said Trix, curling her lips.

"No, but they walk it off here. Three of them talked about their pet doctors all the way down the moor to-day."

"And the women talked of their hats and their tailors in the boat on that loch, and in such deadly earnest."

"Well, never mind now," said Stephen, "let us forget all about them. I was going to tell you about his time at Oxford when I had to start with them this morning. I think it was the happiest time of his life. You know how miserable he had been at school, and then he got tired, after a bit, of too easy a life with his mother. It was at Oxford he began to write seriously, but also he continued his mock dramas, and really it was from the first his writings that took men more than his talk. When they knew how his serious essays were admired by the authorities there was a special gusto in reading the maddest plays in which the authorities figured largely themselves. I wish I could find more of them, the scraps I had are intensely funny, and so exactly what would fascinate undergraduates. He always knew his audience; later on he knew how to deal with the most mixed audiences, giving in one sentence what would draw the general laugh, with an underlying whisper for the esoteric; he could say shibboleth in a breath with the most popular joke."

Trix sat fascinated, greedily drinking in his words, feeling at last the full understanding and sympathy she had never known except in her father's company.

And he felt that every word he spoke to her seemed to have more meaning and be of more value than he had hitherto supposed possible in his most sanguine moments. Then there passed near them two of the long figures in their shooting-suits.

"Not as good a cook as she had last year," said one of them. He glanced up and saw Trix sitting on the weather-beaten wooden bench. He showed as he lifted his cap that he had passed judgment on her beauty; as a man of the world he had condemned the cook and he approved Trix.

His shadow passed from them.

"Did n't you think there was a twang in that port Shenstone was so proud of?" were the words that came from one of the retreating figures.

"Does n't so much as know there is a sunset," said Stephen. Checked for a moment in their talk, the two looked out on the great cloudland spread before them, flushed into deepest colour. Below and behind the clouds was the clearest vision of pale green, and lying in it scraps of rose cast off by the great clouds. They all had a majesty of form, the smallest of them falling into some mysterious order and humbly conscious of the great presence from which alone they gained their passing beauty. They lay still in the heights of the light of the departing sun, submissive, humble, dependent.

Trix, momentarily annoyed by the glance of the heavy man, had quickly found her peace in the sunset.

"You remember that other sunset," she said at last in a low tone.

"Do you know what he said to me that evening?" asked Stephen in a voice that trembled a little.

Trix turned from the peace before her to look at the grave, friendly face by her side.

"He said that he had not expected to find a friend at the last station."

They looked at each other with unfaltering eyes. If either had faltered for a moment perhaps both would have understood. The man who condemned the cook understood, it seemed so obvious to him; but they did not understand themselves.

IX

A WONDERFUL WEEK

GEORGE SHENSTONE was standing by his wife's writing-table receiving her commands for their autumn arrangements with a slight frown on his handsome face.

"We shall need a second motor," she said, "because you will want one to come home in while I am using the other."

"You don't think of coming to London before January?" said Shenstone in a bored tone.

"No," said Mrs. Shenstone firmly, "I am sure that the country is better for me." She had insisted on getting rid of the Wimbledon villa and taking a house in Kent.

At that moment Stephen and Trix passed the window.

"By the way, did you mean to throw that young couple together?"

"Why not?" said Mrs. Shenstone absently. "Yes, the second motor is indispensable."

"What will they live on?" inquired Shenstone doggedly.

"Oh," said Mrs. Shenstone cheerfully, "he must be making something at the Bar."

"Not a farthing; he told me so himself."

"Well, then, there is his writing, and besides Trix will have money."

"Three hundred a year; you told me so the other day!"

"They can so easily live on that," answered his wife. "They have no expensive tastes, and they won't want to go into society. But we must settle about this motor, George."

A slight, sarcastic smile played on George's face. He often heard his wife advising young couples how to manage their little incomes; he wished sometimes they would advise her as to the management of his large one, but of course, that would have been impertinent. He would not tell her that he did not want to have a second motor, or that he wished he could stay in London and not have to run down thirty miles every evening; so he went on talking about Trix.

"She is a beautiful girl, and might do much better. And I don't think it 's quite fair to Mrs. Blake to make up a match between her and this penniless young man."

"But I am not making up a match. What nonsense!"

"Well, I must go; the men are waiting."

"But, George——"

"Well, remember what I say; he is not coming fishing, and we all know why."

After which he walked out of the room, and Mrs. Shenstone soothed herself by explaining to the two other lady guests how easy it was in these days to live on five hundred a year.

Stephen and Trix were not thinking of how people live or feed or are clothed any more than the lilies of the field think of these things. They were in a dream existence, in which Horace, their own particular Horace, was growing daily more ideal. Stephen had brought with him a small box of papers which he had

chosen as belonging to Horace's Oxford life, and a batch of letters written home while he was in Switzerland just after leaving Oxford. The letters said that in the autumn he was to read for the Bar. In Switzerland he had met with St. John Coniston and his daughters. To his mother and Mary he wrote much about the lakes and the odd tourists and the Conistons. To an Oxford friend he wrote about St. John Coniston to the exclusion of every other topic. Many questions lightly raised at Oxford had been dealt with in fearfully sober earnest by St. John Coniston when Horace offered them for his consideration. The ironic sense in the older man was much less acute than in the younger, but he brought to the support of Horace's sarcasms against the absurdities of civilisation steady spade work that mined much deeper than Horace had wished or expected. St. John Coniston poured out, in quiet, even tones of voice, the latest destructive criticism of his day, which it seemed to Stephen was by now out of date. Horace's imagination had leaped to meet it; the expansion was uncommonly rapid. This seemed to have been followed by a time of trouble somewhat incoherently expressed, in which he had written letters to a priest he had known in Oxford. The letters were in parts impertinent in tone, which impertinence seemed to have made the priest angry. He did not seem to have seen through the flippancy, the suffering it was half meant to conceal. Was there really, after all, so little to be said for Christianity? Why had he not been told at least something of the difficulties when he was growing up? Then jokes followed and absurd stories of the teaching he had had at school. Underneath it all was the cry for help as the ideals and the spiritual sustenance of

his youth became unreal to his imagination. Presently the letters to the priest ceased; the letters home were reticent, but happy. One letter to his sister told the climax; he was engaged to Kate Coniston.

Stephen and Trix understood imperfectly what had passed in Horace under the influence of St. John Coniston. They dimly felt a great change in the intellectual tone. Perhaps with some unconscious sympathy they turned eagerly from the sadder letters to those showing the history that culminated in Horace's marriage. He was at that moment, at least, intensely happy. For the time he saw all things from a Coniston point of view; he was merged in the family life, and evidently the centre of its admiration and pride. Kate had sent Stephen some letters from St. John Coniston to his friends, speaking of Horace as the young man of the greatest promise he had ever known; prophesying a great future for him. The Conistons in their dignified, austere fashion had lost their heads with the excitement of discovering Horace. Trix read the letters with a glow of colour on her cheeks.

Stephen from hour to hour made new discoveries in the packets he had brought.

"Not content with sitting in her pocket," said one of the guests to George Shenstone, "he is always writing her letters and giving them to her when he does not think we are watching."

"They are her grandfather's letters about her father," George Shenstone explained.

"Grandmother!" was the only answer vouchsafed by the first speaker: and perhaps that was natural.

"So the young man is leaving to-morrow; and is

going off to see the young lady's mama?" he said to his host two days later.

Trix and Stephen were extremely business-like on the last day they had together.

"It is better that I should see Mrs. Blake before you get back. I can't believe she will really make any difficulty about my using the paper you have written. It is the best thing I could possibly have. I shall try to write up to it. Oh, no! it 's impossible that she should not appreciate it."

"I 'm so glad I shall not be there," cried Trix; "I can't tell you how I should dread it."

They were silent as they paced up and down by the water's edge. The boat that was to take him down the loch to join the steamer beyond was waiting at the tiny pier.

Stephen looked round him with a full heart.

"It is going to rain," he said.

"Yes, the weather is breaking," said Trix mournfully.

"But we have had a most wonderful week," cried Stephen.

Then a man appeared carrying Stephen's luggage, and Mrs. Shenstone stood at the front door to say "good-bye."

X

THE WORLD WOULD LAUGH

ADDED to the deeper and more complicated suffering, Kate felt the intellectual loss of Horace almost incessantly; she had lived a keen, intellectual life in his company, and now there was nothing interesting said to her by anybody. Her greatest preoccupation was the biography, and her nearest approach to excitement was the unsettled question of the publication of the last play.

She had looked forward to Stephen's coming, but in twenty-four hours he had caused her more acute pain than she had ever thought would be her lot again. She had been prepared to say much to him about the beginnings of her husband's literary life; about the first play he produced on the stage, and how it had been brought out in a great provincial town. She could give the full history of the dawning of his genius on the world.

And then, sitting in the tiny study in Anne's cottage, this monstrous absurdity of Stephen's view of the biography was explained to her quite as a matter of course; and as a climax he calmly told her that there was a whole chapter of Trix's own writing that was to be included. Stephen inspired by Trix! The gross absurdity of that child teaching this young man how to write Horace Blake's Life almost made her laugh! But the saddest thing of all, what hurt her most, was the idea of this sketch of the last weeks of her hus-

band's life, the weeks during which she had been kept at a distance, the weeks during which he had sunk under the influence of the old superstitions from which she had helped to free him in his youth. She knew that Trix had fallen under the same influences; she could imagine the flow of pietistic gush over the very things that were most painful to herself, and she knew, too, how ridiculous it would appear to her own world to have such a chapter published as the concluding account of Horace Blake. It would rejoice the sort of sectarian papers that were already inclined to boast that he had made a Christian end. Kate tried to control herself; she was very anxious not to say or do anything that could be unnecessarily painful to Trix. But the overmastering desire at the moment was to crush this monstrous absurdity before it could go any further. She felt for the first time how very rashly she had acted in giving the work to this young man at all. "Too late to think of getting out of the agreement now," was her despairing reflection, as Stephen went glibly on, misled by the calmness of her attitude.

"Mr. Tempest," she said at last, "I am very sorry; you and Trix have wasted a great deal of time."

Stephen thus pulled up short, suddenly realised how very badly he had started on his explanations.

"I cannot imagine why Trix did not tell me what she was doing. I feel very sorry about it. It was probably a comfort to her to write it, but if I had known I could have warned her that it could never be part of the biography. I cannot bring myself to read this paper. There is a degree of suffering that I am not called upon to bear. You neither of you know what you are talking about. You cannot possibly

judge at all without reading all the papers. The world would simply laugh if you tried to make him out what your fancy and Trix's fancy have produced." She paused, and then went on: "Ah! I had hoped you would have taken your work seriously. I expected you to read the whole of what I could give you before you began to make your outline even in your own mind. You ought to see him in his height and his breadth and even in his depths before you begin to write. He was one of the great geniuses of the world, and the little rules that apply to other men were not meant for him. If you try to get a watery nimbus round his head you make him ridiculous. His dramatic genius developed itself through evil as well as good. I think he *had* to know vice. That is my explanation and that is why I . . . No, I will not be driven to speak of myself. I have never done that. But I am the only being in the world who knew him through it all. I don't mind if the world calls him a bad man if he is given his true place as a great one. What does anybody know of good or evil? He exploited himself, exhausted his nerves in the world's service. He was not born with the moral sensitiveness of other men just as they were not born with his genius."

The low tones went over Stephen's bowed head like threatening thunder. Once he looked up and thought that she was terrible but great. Her voice had in it a volume of conviction that was masterful. Dark as fate was the expression on the large worn features.

"Do you want to see him through the diminishing glass of poor little Trix's fancy? It would be a water-colour sketch in contrast to the mighty statue of his true self! I won't ask you to give up writing the Life,

Mr. Tempest, but I must ask you to put all this out of your mind. I have two trunks of papers now that you have not even glanced at. I can send them to you in a few days. Approach them with a free mind. And as to Trix's sketch, do not speak to me about it again. Of course I know there is a glamour about the religion that has got hold of Trix. Why, I saw Horace cast it off with pain and regret, but, good Heavens! he did cast it off, and his mind expanded as if he had cast off the most binding of fetters. That was the liberating of his genius, and now, because at the end, when the poison of his disease reached his brain, he fell into the hands of those old priests, I am to have this preposterous mistake drawn out and presented to the world. For all the sane years of his manhood Horace hated religion. He left us all behind him in that. He taught me to loathe it; the words he used about it were terrible even to me. I don't blame poor Trix; I did not want her to be with him at the end. It was all too much for a young girl. I am not in the least surprised, but I cannot possibly allow her to interfere in this; it would be to fail in my duty. I must have the truth told about Horace, and that she would not understand, and I don't want her to understand. I have done much in my life that I would not otherwise have done to prevent her knowing the truth about her father."

And as she spoke Stephen heard Trix's voice that was so far more winning, saying of her mother:

"She *thinks* she only wants the truth."



XI

YOU WERE ABOUT ALL DAY

KATE did not wait to see what Stephen would say to her. Having reached the limit of her powers of endurance she left him and walked out of the room as if she had forgotten his presence.

Stephen felt, in spite of the dignity and self-control she had shown, that there had been a scene, and, of course, being a man, he hated a scene. He went out across the garden and made his way to the common, no doubt looking a little like a schoolboy who has received a scolding from the head master. He was sore and angry and indignant, but most of all he was unhappy at the danger of losing Trix's sketch; that it was already lost he would not accept. To him it was as it might be with an artist who had started his picture with painting in the eyes, who felt he had caught the eyes truly, and then was imperiously ordered to rub them out again! A portrait painter is in his rights if he refuses interference that he knows will spoil his work. And here was Mrs. Blake trying to cut out this exquisite bit of work which he knew to be as true as it was lovely, actuated by her bitter, narrow prejudice against religion. He wished he had told her nothing about it at this early stage; an artist will not let his first sketch be seen by those who cannot understand what is still only a hint at the final conception.

"Even if he did some queer things at one time,"

thought Stephen, "that need not interfere with my main idea. Besides, I 've no doubt Blake pitched into the shams of religion pretty hotly to Mrs. Blake, and she took the thing wholesale. She would not understand what there was in him that comes out so exquisitely in Trix's sketch. She prates of truthfulness; she does not wish me to hide his lapses (they don't count), but because of the Popery she wants me to sacrifice the truth as to his last weeks." At that moment he could not endure Kate Blake.

"Well," he said to himself, "she shall find that I am going to speak the truth or not write the book at all. If I am not to use what Trix has written, and I won't give it up unless she agrees herself, I shall go to Brittany and see the *curé* and the sacristan and get at the truth for myself, but I shall never be able to give it to the world as well as his daughter has written it. It needed hereditary genius for that."

He went back to the cottage only just in time to dress for dinner. There was an inevitable stiffness during the whole evening, and Stephen was truly glad that his early departure next morning had been fixed on the day of his arrival. Kate was out walking when he came down to breakfast, and Anne gave him his tea and talked politics laboriously while he ate his ham.

"My sister asked me to give you this if she was not back in time to see you again."

Stephen opened the letter as the fly took him across the common to the station. Before he read it he looked back at the cottage. It was low and thatched, and late autumn creepers gave it deep hues of red and light hues of green and yellow. The smoke from a chimney curled and turned in a grey streak against

the blue distance. It had been Trix's home, in appearance so like many, many little homes up and down the country, so unlike in reality.

Then he turned to the letter:

"DEAR MR. TEMPEST,

"I do not feel equal to reopening the questions we discussed yesterday. I do not want to go into things with you now, that you will see differently when you have mastered all the papers. Then I shall not have to ask you to leave out Trix's writing; you will want to leave it out yourself. In the agreement we signed at Wimbledon it was stipulated that you should only use the material I sent you. This paper of Trix's I refuse to allow you to publish; you will understand why before long.

"Yours sincerely,

"KATHERINE BLAKE."

Stephen was not really impressed by this prophecy. Indeed the tone of the letter added considerably to his indignation.

Stephen was truly glad when he found himself alone in the little flat that evening. He was much pleased with his new abode. It could hardly have been higher, and there was no lift. Solitude was emphasised by the slight distant sound of traffic far below. Once a day the flat was visited by a woman who "did" the cleaning, and whose whole person suggested a large family life out of sight. As she did not spare time to look out of the windows no one but Stephen enjoyed exactly the same view as he did. He had come up from Anne Coniston's cottage with his mind irritated

and nervous. Even next day when he tried to write the narrative of Horace Blake's first connection with St. John Coniston, he felt as a poet might feel who is expected to write while angry voices in dispute reach him from the next room. Still the glorious solitude of the inexpensive heights where he had taken up his abode began to soothe him exceedingly. The rooms belonged to a lady who lectured on literature; they were austerely simple in effect, no glory of colour, only dull greens, sober cloth-bound books in white shelves, a few photographs of great pictures, a few exquisite casts. They had, in their moderate dimensions, the sense of space that is so often lost in really large rooms. Stephen sat there on his second evening in London leaning back in an armchair—not quite an easy-chair—that held him with a firm support, looking out on the innumerable lights that spread as wide below him as stars could spread in the firmament. The night was cool, a touch of almost autumnal freshness put spirit into it. He had had a moderate dinner at a very moderate price in a foreign restaurant, and then had climbed his mountain height. He sat now smoking and looking, giving himself up to sheer enjoyment of the sense of liberty. There was no one he knew in London except probably Edward Hales; the obligations and claims of social life were reduced to a minimum. "Alone sat freedom on the heights," he murmured smiling. And then his thoughts turned dreamily to other heights where he had sat so lately with Trix. He did not think of Trix as an ideal, more as a very pleasing and curious discovery of his own. She was so unlike other people. He felt a little responsible for her, and zealous about her as if she were a cause and also something he had in charge.

The immense moment of liberty was soon lost after that. He had put himself into bonds again that felt at first as sheer added pleasure, but which soon revived the irritation from which he had escaped. He turned on the light a few minutes later and wrote to her. He tried to conceal his anger as to what had passed at the cottage, but he left it easy to understand.

"It seemed so painful," he concluded, "that it happened in the house you grew up in. I pictured you to myself as a child running up and down the little stairs and picking flowers in the garden. You were about all day, and soothed me not a little. I saw through an open door, a Breton *bénitier*. I think that must have been your room, and I remembered that he gave you one that he had bought in the village. I cannot tell you how that took me back to St. Jean des Pluies. I seemed to hear the sea not far off. Don't be troubled about your sketch of those days. I was very foolish to bring up the matter before Mrs. Blake could see the proportions it would take in the book. I am not going to make him a superstitious *dévot*. I shall work on until there is something fit to show her. Besides, she must know that whether I use your words or not, I must tell the truth as to those last weeks. She has been naturally irritated by one of the Romish papers boasting of Blake as a Catholic who was educated by a religious Order, and who made a saintly end. Such rot ought not to affect her. I hope you will stay on in the Highlands; you were getting more colour every day. It is just as well that you should be away a little while longer."

He finished the letter, debated for a moment whether to go down to the hall to post it now, or wait till the morning, and then impulsively decided on a

night walk, and leaving the flat came out on to the gloomy central staircase.

As he walked quickly down flight after flight of stone stairs dimly lighted, his thoughts of Trix went on. He reached the bottom with a harder clang on the asphalt floor, and had just dropped his letter in the hall post-box when he realised that three men were looking at him—the porter of the mansions and two railway men. He felt that they were unjustly annoyed with him, and he saw at a glance that the wrong imputed to him was the fact that two evidently weighty packing-cases bore his name. The hall-porter moved away a little as if disclaiming any responsibility. "The luggage lift can't be worked to-night," he remarked.

"If you 'll take them up now," said Stephen, "I 'll give you five bob each and a drink at the top."

So they did it, and left him, puffed but very friendly. The two cases, untidy, sinister objects, stood open in the middle of the sitting-room. The men had thrown in the opening of the cases as an act of grace after stiffish glasses of whiskey-and-soda. Stephen took out armfuls of packets of letters and flung them on the writing-table, on the sofa—anywhere and everywhere. He began to read them that night.

XII

HE GROWS MORE AMAZINGLY VIVID

EDWARD HALES loved London at the end of August. What he disliked had left it, what he liked was still there. He hated all the people who wanted to know where each other went and what each other did. He liked the people who talked with you and took drinks from you, and very likely told you their sorrows without asking where you lived and what might be your serious claims on their attention. He was letting himself into the little house in St. George's Square, and was actually turning the latch-key in the lock, when he had the unpleasant impression of an acquaintance of the former class wishing to accost him. But his frown changed as he recognised Stephen.

"Ah! come in," he growled heartily.

Gas burned low in the dingy hall through which Hales led the way into his sanctum. He lighted half a dozen candles while Stephen stood silent and absorbed in the middle of the room. The candles lit up some rare engravings and finely-bound books.

"Are n't you going to sit down?" growled Hales.

Stephen sat down, still in silence.

"Or to smoke?" said Hales.

Stephen mechanically drew out a cigarette-case and accepted a match.

"Why, if you knew Blake, did n't you warn me?" he asked.

"I like that," said Hales, interested and amused by the sudden attack. "I told you not to do it."

"But when——"

"When," Hales interrupted, "I found you had already bound yourself to do it I gave you the best advice I could. I told you to do what Mrs. Blake wanted—to follow her implicitly."

Stephen groaned, but his eyes were bright and keen.

"I wish to goodness I 'd never come across the Blakes—wife or husband," he said impatiently.

"What 's the matter?" said Hales slowly.

"The matter is," said Stephen, "that I 've been a prodigious ass. I began the biography at the beginning. I 've written the childhood and the youth up to the time he met the Conistons—I had plenty of material for that—and then, you see, I knew Blake at the end."

"When he was dying in the odour of sanctity," grunted Hales. "And it was precisely all the rest of which you knew nothing."

"I know now," said Stephen.

"I wonder if you do," said Hales, speaking in a low voice to himself.

"Do you remember," said Stephen, "a talk we had here about *Puritan Anne?*"

"Yes," said Hales.

"Well, if I 'd listened to you then I might have been saved a lot. I see it now. Do you know, I 've heaped together all the fine things Blake put in the mouths of some of his characters? They made out a grand case for Blake as a reformer and as a man. I gave him credit for the passion, the earnestness, the self-denying zeal of Selden, for instance—you remember Selden?"

"Perfectly," said Hales. "That was simply part of the man's miraculously true dramatic insight into the characters he created."

"And those qualities," said Stephen bitterly, "had no existence whatever in Selden's creator."

"None whatever," said Hales cheerfully.

"And he had none of the qualities of Martindale, the great judge in *False Measures*, either."

"None at all—not a vestige of them," agreed Hales. "But mind you, Tempest, he never pretended he had. You have been making an anthology of the virtuous speeches. You have left out the passages where the other characters sneer back. I told you that Blake's evil mind trailed over it all. I told you the vilest thing in his work was just his use of the best things; no man ever soiled the purest or debased the noblest things as Blake did."

Hales's voice had risen higher than usual; there was in it a rare touch of passion.

"And the way he got his knowledge," said Stephen, "was to leave nothing sacred."

"There must be letters of extraordinary interest."

Stephen nodded.

"How he kept them to witness against him I can't conceive," he said after a moment's silence.

"Oh, I can," said Hales, "I know his methods. He kept by him anything that he could possibly use. Again and again he used his own vile or mean experiences, and he rewrote the reproaches of those whom he had injured, still keeping their most cutting or touching words, wrote them up into things that will last as long as the language. Even I took some grist to his mill. I sent him a play to read; he used it, changed it from poor stuff to gold without taking the

trouble to disguise a thing in it. My letter of remonstrance grew into the dying playwright's splendid lament in *Second-rate Men*. Life, men, and women, were only rough material for the next play. His wife was the only exception. She was his comrade, his partner in his pirate's expedition."

"There is one letter I mind more than all the rest," said Stephen, "without date, or name, or sign of where it came from. It is terribly beautifully written, by a woman of an exquisite mind, of extreme sensibility, a soul in torture. 'Why do you put into this play what I cannot but feel to be, down to the minutest detail, the reflection of our own miserable story?' "

"Probably," said Hales, "he had brought about the miserable story simply in order to write a play about it."

"He almost tells her so in what is clearly his answer which is a panegyric on realism in art. It is in essay form—conceive! Here 's one sentence."

Stephen drew out his notebook, and read: "'All experience has tenfold value to the artist, as enabling him to depict our strange world and our strange human nature as they really are, and in all their varieties.' Beast!"

"Don't worry," said Hales.

"*Not* worry when I have to write the book?" But there had been excitement as well as nervous anxiety in Stephen's manner all the evening.

"Why on earth has she shown you all these wretched papers?"

"Because she wants a true picture.'

"The dickens she does!" Hales stared at him in astonishment, and then gave a big guffaw.

"She was very much annoyed at my trying to

idealise him, and she simply would not stand descriptions of his last days."

"In the odour of sanctity!" laughed Hales. "Well, that would be a bit too tall. How he did hate religion! I don't love it myself—but Blake! How do you explain his end?"

Stephen hesitated. He had not consciously faced it yet, but the glib words when they came showed that his thoughts had been on it more than he knew.

"It was part of the collapse. He was worn out by vice, he had gone to pieces. The priests played upon his fears."

"I daresay that 's true up to a certain point, but I 'm not sure it was n't partly his devouring curiosity. Perhaps he wanted to *try* a death-bed repentance, and if he did it he would do it thoroughly. He did everything on a large scale. He always seemed to me to be a worse thing than his own worst actions. My goodness, Tempest! It 's the chance of your life. If Mrs. Blake wants a true picture give it her! What a subject!"

Hales got up and stood leaning his back against the chimney-piece.

"What a figure to put on the canvas bursting with vitality—even the smell of the devil that hung about him makes for life. And I fancy you 've got it in you to do it! I envy you, but I could never have done it. Look at those books," he pointed to the shelves where all the first editions of Blake's works showed their well-worn backs; "then the materials you have got."

"I must own," said Stephen quickly, "that for the last three days and nights I 've been obsessed with him; all the time he disgusts me most, he grows more amazingly vivid. But if you are right and I let myself

go and paint the scoundrel as I see him now, how would she stand it?"

He was not really thinking of the widow.

"Mrs. Blake? Why she must. It 's her own doing; she has refused the idealised picture, she must take the real one. You have her in the hollow of your hand."

They were silent, but excited.

"I wonder if she has given you everything? Is there anything about Nancy Potter?"

"No," said Stephen.

"Nor about the attempt on his life by that young Davis? He was the original for Wedderburn in *False Measures.*"

"No, but I 've by no means finished what Mrs. Blake has sent me."

"And all sorts of things would not come into the letters," mused Hales. "He certainly was known to cheat at cards; at one time he had a craze for destroying the reputations of harmless people; his talk was often insupportable. And then, too, there was some biggish fraud he was involved in. But she hushed it up. I believe that half the money he made went in hushing up things."

Hales sat down again, crossed his legs, and refilled his pipe.

"But you need know no more than she tells you. Take my advice this time; make a real living thing of him entirely from the papers she gives you, and then 'ware! If she tries to touch it afterwards you are on strong ground. Don't attend to gossip —you 've got quite enough without it. Your place in literature is secure, my boy. Don't be such an ass as to wish that you had never known the

Horace Blakes—it 's just your amazing luck! Bless me! what a chance!"

He puffed on in a silence that Stephen was not disposed to disturb.

"I doubt if she will interfere with you," he said presently.

"She does not mind his being called a bad man if he is called a great one," said Stephen.

"She 's no fool," said Hales; "of course, he will be called both. I think I am beginning to understand her line about it. If she had an idealised biography now, the 'show-up' of his real character must follow at once. A candid, official biography will prevent the harpies nosing about to discover more. You can make that candid biography a fearfully living thing. And now, do you know, I must go to bed. You 'll overlook my weakness as it is two o'clock. There, listen!" Big Ben was faint but clear in confirming Hales's statement.

By a sudden revulsion under the influence of Hales, Stephen, after leaving him, was excited, and almost happy. His study of the papers had been truly a sheer misery. The shock to his ideal, the loss of that friend of his hitherto named Horace Blake, and the horror above all that this rotten being now called Horace Blake was the father of Trix.

But all the time that he was really suffering from disgust and anger and shock, while he was swearing to himself that he would give anything never to have known the Blakes, there had been a kind of detached consciousness of the greatness of the artistic opportunity. Even while he most sincerely groaned to Hales and blamed him for not having prevented him

from undertaking the job, he was wondering what Hales would say of it now. And then Hales, from the moment he heard of Kate's attitude, had seen the greatness of the opportunity, and had revealed to him what was half consciously lying at the back of his own thoughts. With a double force the thing got hold of Stephen now, or, rather, Blake himself got hold of him. Stephen's artistic faculties were excited to exert their utmost capacities; they were immensely receptive. That night Blake overpowered him; his attitude for the moment was non-moral in his regard; he became a spectator, not a judge. It was no longer that he had to wrench himself away from the earlier dream. The Horace he had imagined had clearly never existed. This strange human reality was so overpoweringly interesting. The vision of the sunset by the sea reflected in the spiritual look of those great light eyes, the fascination that had drawn Stephen into the comedy in which Horace played the part of a sacristan's saint—Stephen to-night regretted none of it; indeed, how valuable it all was; to have been fascinated was an immense gain to his biographer. And so, for the moment, the image of Trix faded as the image of a woman does fade when she would be an importunate interference in the business of life.

Stephen had meanwhile walked slowly northwards until he reached the block of buildings that held his nest—as it seemed to him, midway between the city and the sky. Back in his own room, leaning out of the window across the parapet, he had a dream of the great world below him. So far it had been but a vast inverted horizon, where the stars looked up instead of down; to-night it seemed an infinite hive of human beings full of life, dramatic, coloured, intense. The

adjectives must be vague, because the thing in his mind was utterly vague. He was a bit intoxicated; he told himself it was life, but that was not true, he was intoxicated, not by life, but by his literary sense. The great book he was going to write was the intoxication. He saw London in a Blake reverie as he might have seen London in a Hogarth reverie, and in the intoxication he was, as it were, a little god.

Next morning came a letter from Trix; he opened it almost impatiently. At first he half wondered what she meant. By the second sentence, of course, he understood. It was her answer to the grumble he had written to her after his visit to her mother.

"I am so very, very sorry you should have had this trouble through me. Perhaps if I had written nothing, you would have gone on quietly without upsetting her. Mother would not let me tell her anything about the time in Brittany. I thought she would want to know it all. I see now how dreadfully she felt his having left her in England. But we must be true to him while we are as kind to her as possible. It won't matter if you have to give up my words, you can put it all better in your own. I did wish I could have shown you the cottage. I suppose that no one told you which was my own garden? Mother wishes me to stay on here, and there is nothing to go back for; nobody wants me. But I wish you were still here; no one has noticed the flowers, or the lights on the loch, or the sunsets yet; I suppose they never will.

"Yes, it was my *bénitier*, and he chose it; he liked the painting of the little girl kneeling at the foot of the cross. I hope you will tell me how you get on.

"Yours most sincerely,

"TRIX BLAKE."

Poor child! Yet what could be done? We all feel a little impatience mixed with pity when we see a man or a woman living in a fool's paradise. He was angry with himself for his share in building up her delusions. The letter hurt, and he did not want to examine the hurt. He put it from him, and turned his whole attention to the work before him.

XIII

YOU ARE AFRAID

AT the end of that week Stephen went down to the country; his mother had made a point of his spending the Sunday with her and his sisters, who were staying with her for a few days. They all three loved to have him and found him as charming and sympathetic as ever, only he was certainly growing very absent-minded, and his craze for exercise was becoming tiresome when it meant quite so many hours' walking during a too-brief Sunday. He was under the spell of the Blake Life—his thoughts were talking to Hales during the morning service, and so unconscious of the state of his own mind was he that he felt a pleasant emotion as he looked back at the square, ivy-grown tower, thinking how he had enjoyed the service, of which he had not taken in three consecutive words. All day his thoughts took the form of addressing Hales, because he did not want them to talk to Trix. He was unconsciously trying to ward off the feeling of pain caused by her letter, to which he did not care to give attention. Some pain is very easily endured if it need not be regarded seriously, for instance, as a symptom. Briefly, it could not be disloyal to Trix to act truthfully—she must some day know the whole or a great part of the whole thing. It was clearly somebody's business to tell her before long as much as she must inevitably find out, sooner or later.

He had hoped to get to London early on Monday morning, but he was kept by his mother, who was in need of his help for some business, and it was impossible to refuse to do what was wanted. As it was, she evidently felt that he had hardly given the matter enough time or attention. He congratulated himself on just catching the Scotch express for London at Rugby. He had had some sandwiches and rejecting the porter's suggestion of the restaurant-car, made his way through the corridor of a first-class carriage in search of a third-class smoking compartment. At that moment he was startled at seeing Trix leaning back with her eyes shut. He half sprang back, and then hurried forward. Trix opened her eyes; she flushed with pleasure at seeing him.

"The Shenstones are in the restaurant-car," she explained in an eager tone. "I escaped after the soup because the carriage was so hot. How lucky—or do you want luncheon?"

Perhaps one of the many thoughts in his mind had shown itself for the fraction of a second—the dread of the fact that they could, if they chose, talk freely. Then came almost more than his usual earnest friendliness.

"No, I have had my food; might I come into your carriage? I thought you were to be another week in the Highlands?"

"We were, but Mr. Shenstone was obliged to come up and Mrs. Shenstone began to wish to see her dressmaker. I am going home, and it is so fortunate that I should see you first. I want to talk about the line I had better take with mother."

Stephen groaned. As he sat himself down beside her he only wished to Heaven he knew what line to take with poor Trix herself.

"I think," she went on, "that what you said is so true. We must wait till you have written enough of the book for her to really understand what you mean."

"Yes," said Stephen, without the least enthusiasm.

"The great thing is to gain time," Trix went on with her wise air, "so that you should be able to work freely. But I do think—" She paused. Stephen seemed to be attending more to the flat Midland landscape than to her. He turned round and suddenly the sense of her loveliness was betrayed in his face.

"I do think," she went on eagerly, "that I may have to settle at once about my sketch. I mean that if mother insists I must consent to its not being published in the biography."

Stephen felt that she expected a vehement protest from him, and, alas! he could not make any protest at all. This time the look in his eyes was not enough for Trix; she felt the personal note, and for the first time she stiffened—it annoyed her to be made self-conscious.

Stephen turned to the view and made a great effort.

"It is horribly sad," he said, and Trix saw that he acquiesced in the dropping of her paper.

"But," she went on, anxious not to be vain or self-confident as to the value of the work he had praised so highly; "you can tell it all far better in your own words, can't you?"

Tell it all? Tell all the sweet child's ideal picture of the last weeks of the man whom the sacristan had called a saint! He writhed. He could not look at her now, he did not raise his eyes beyond one little white hand that held a grey glove. He longed to break through this dreadful embarrassment. This longing

was followed by a keen momentary temptation, immediately resisted, to put her off with soft words.

"I am afraid," he began in a voice that sounded ashamed, "that I must give up a great deal of what I wanted to do.

Then his tongue stumbled. Trix's hand gave a quick movement; the fingers closed, she said nothing.

"My first plan won't work." He found he could not get on; he produced a foolish little sentence: "You have not read his plays."

"But you had read his plays long ago; I don't understand what you mean. Why"—she turned and lifted a flat, green bag on to her knees and opened it and took out the letter he had written to her after his visit to the cottage—"*that* was written so very lately," she said breathlessly.

Stephen took it from her and his anxious, troubled eyes met hers. She looked astonished and angry as well as troubled. It was a very sharp pain that shot through Stephen and left him quite pale.

"Yes," he said, "I found out since then that I had been on the wrong tack."

"Then you are afraid of the truth, too?" she cried, and her eyes shot glances past him at the landscape, glances that had some of the brilliance of her father's when he was angry. Inwardly she was thinking: "It is mother's doing, but how can he?—how can he?"

"Then all our talk in the Highlands," she said aloud, "all you saw in Brittany, all you know to be true, is to be suppressed for fear of helping the Church of Rome in the public mind?"

"No, indeed," cried Stephen, "only—" He could not say to her, "Horace Blake played one last comedy at the end, made one final effort to deceive

himself and you and me." He saw in his mind the look that her father used to give to Trix as she bent over him—the piteous glance of a beggar at a ministering angel. It had surely been melodramatic and overdone.

"Only what?" came in steely tones from Trix.

They were passing Hatfield, and this horrible journey would soon be over, but he clung to what was left. When should he be so near to her again? What could he say? It was intolerable to have to cut his own throat in this way and not to be able to cry out even at his pain. To explain was impossible unless he told her the truth. The only way to save himself was to make her suffer, and that he would not do.

"I wish I could explain," he cried from his heart. "Oh! do believe me; do try to believe me. I have gone through a great deal before I saw that our plan would make the world think him ridiculous; they would only say that his illness had made his brain fail him at the end."

"You are repeating mother's words," said Trix bitterly. "Oh, I never thought—" Her whole disappointment with him cried out of the unfinished sentence.

"But," she said a moment later, "I know what I must do. If no one else will speak the truth, I shall. Nobody can prevent my publishing what I choose. If it is too short for a book, my paper can appear as an article."

Stephen felt more dumb than ever. An insane impulse to kiss the white hand that quivered in his sight, to kneel down and tell her that he loved her and her alone, and would do anything in the world she could wish, was almost more than he could control.

"You won't say 'yes' or 'no'; you are afraid!" she cried.

Stephen had to look, at her. She was quivering with excitement. Her cheeks were bright, her hair ruffled, her eyes glowing as he had never seen them glow before.

"Trix," said a tired voice, "would you give me my little bag?"

Mrs. Shenstone was standing watching them.

"Where have you dropped from, Mr. Tempest?"

Stephen shook hands, but found himself for a moment unable to explain. But at last he conveyed to her mind that he had got into the train at Rugby junction on his way to London. Could he be of use?

He soon found that the offer involved him deeply in the multitudinous possessions of Mrs. Shenstone. He had to precede that lady back to the restaurant-car; when the train stopped he was still in attendance, and Trix had disappeared.

Stephen was greeted by George Shenstone, and then tacitly dismissed by him amidst the mountains of trunks that always followed in the wake of his wife. George Shenstone was always cross at the station on getting back from Scotland. Stephen's own porter had shouldered his portmanteau; there was no shadow of an excuse for delay.

XIV

ABSOLUTELY IN THE MOON

THOUGH she might not be a good judge of wigs, Mrs. Shenstone was not a bad judge of the expression on a face. She had seen that a hot argument was being concluded between Trix and Stephen when she had looked into their division of the compartment. The child was obviously very much upset. Whatever had gone wrong between them had evidently in Trix's eyes gone very wrong indeed. She seemed dazed when they parted, too dazed to be able to make her thanks for all Mrs. Shenstone's kindness, but it was an omission that was readily forgiven in view of the droop of the young lips and the despairing expression of the brown eyes. Mrs. Shenstone could almost have envied the keenness of her feelings—it was so young to feel like that.

During the remaining hour's journey alone on her way home Trix sat back staring at the fields and hedgerows and cottages with unseeing eyes which sometimes filled with tears that were brushed impatiently away. She had just quarrelled with her only friend, and in doing so she had made the discovery that to quarrel with him was to suffer terribly herself. She was angry with Stephen, angry at his weakness, angry at his being able to change so quickly, so easily under her mother's influence. But of course she was much more angry with her mother than with Stephen. Alternating with these thoughts and

gradually taking a larger part in her attention were the memories that crowded in on her of her friendship with Stephen from the first, the friendship that she had just done her best to destroy.

"I was annoyed at mother sending him to see us, but then I liked him almost at once. He was so gentle and considerate with father, and very, very sympathetic with me." What was the use now that she had lost his friendship, now that he had proved unfaithful to her father's memory, of adding to her own pain by going back over it all? Which last reflection naturally only made her go over it all again and again. She wondered at her own stupidity; even in the Highlands, even in that week of bliss, she had not known why she was blissful. Had Mrs. Shenstone and Mr. Shenstone and all the party noticed anything, suspected anything? She decided that they had not.

"They knew he was working at father's Life, and that would explain our having so much to say to each other."

She began to think how much they had talked of besides her father's Life, and she blushed as she remembered little things now that she had hardly noticed at the time. It was harder not to cry at that and she did not want to get back to the cottage with red eyes.

Trix was met at the station by the gardener with the pony-carriage. He was a shy and silent youth, and did not do more than greet Trix by touching his cap. After they had started and were out on the common he told her that Miss Coniston was alone as Mrs. Blake was in London. This was a relief, and Trix lay back while the pony trotted gently on. How intensely familiar and how changed the common looked to her!

There were the sparse heather and the close green turf and the luxuriant blackberry-bushes crowding round the hollies, while here and there the white trunk of a silver birch raised its tapering silver line from among the dark bushes below, until it shone against the rosy-tinted blue of the evening sky. The common was an old friend who soothed her even without understanding her pain.

Anne was not quite pleased with the obvious fact that Trix was hardly conscious of her presence. There was something that might be mistaken for a childish sense of importance and superiority in her mien. Though she was still in black Mrs. Shenstone and her maid combined had taught her to wear her mourning with a difference; there was particularly something in the way in which her hair was done that was unfamiliar and unattractive to her aunt. Trix came to their supper looking very white and holding her head a little defiantly like a child who wishes to prove that she is not sleepy. She was still only dimly conscious of Anne's presence, but also dimly wished to look as if nothing were wrong.

They hardly spoke during supper. After coffee Trix came sufficiently out of the drama of her own feelings to begin to wish to gather some information. Anne was bending over an embroidery-frame. Trix's fingers were fidgeting with a ball of wool.

"Is mother staying on in London?"

"I don't know how long she may be kept, but I hope she may get back to-morrow."

Then, with an effort:

"The garden looks beautiful, Aunt Anne, even after the garden in the Highlands."

Trix did not notice that Anne's face softened,

because she had not noticed the previous stiffness. She was wondering how to bring in Stephen's name, and she blushed as she stirred the sugar in her coffee.

"Mr. Tempest wrote to me that it was the most charming cottage."

"He wrote to you?" asked Anne.

"Oh, yes; he has often written to me."

Trix was engrossed in the effort to keep her cheeks cool.

"How hot it is down south," she said, and she got up and went to open the little latticed window near her.

"You don't mind?" she asked politely.

"My dear child, as if I ever minded fresh air." Anne's voice was a little irritable.

"How long did he stay here?"

"Oh, Mr. Tempest? Only two nights."

Trix did not dare to ask what she wanted to know. She wondered if Anne knew what had passed between Stephen and her mother.

"Had you met him before?"

"Yes, once at Wimbledon for a few minutes."

"Do you like him?" asked Trix, and then, furious with herself, she felt the colour growing in her face. Anne did not look up.

"I thought him rather ordinary."

"Mother likes him," cried Trix.

"I don't think she liked him so much after he came here."

There was silence for some minutes. Trix was dying to know what had happened. Did not Aunt Anne know that mother had got her own way as to the biography? That Trix's influence had fizzled out altogether?

"Have you unpacked yet?" asked Anne.

"No, I have n't," said Trix sharply, and jumping up she dashed out of the room.

Anne Coniston looked at the retreating figure as if the limits of her patience had been reached. She was convinced that Trix was the root of the difficulty between her sister and Stephen Tempest. It was intolerable that this child should interfere with the only thing in the world that mattered to Kate, and that by a flirtation with the first young man who had come within reach.

"What else could one expect from Horace Blake's daughter?"

A year ago Trix had given her a good deal of satisfaction. Anne Coniston was a born educator, and Trix had lived a quiet, contented life. She had been fond of her aunt in a matter-of-course way, and Anne had been far from wishing for a deep affection from Trix which she could not conceivably return. Anne did not take to grown-up girls; she liked pupils and Trix had suddenly thrown off all pupilage.

Anne presently put away the embroidery-frame and stood looking out into the dark; overhead Trix moving her trunk noisily.

"I do think that Kate ought to be free now. I thought we could go abroad and see something and do something together, but we can't do anything as long as Trix gives so much trouble."

Trix, between temper and anxiety and the unmanageable new excitement that had hold of her, lay awake most of the night. It seemed intolerable not to know what had changed Stephen, what had made him disloyal to her father's memory. He had been in

Brittany with them, had known her father himself, and anyhow why could he not trust her to speak the absolute truth? Either he did not trust her now, or he was willing to suppress what he knew to be true; there was no other alternative to explain his conduct. He had looked unhappy, almost guilty to-day, but he had not yielded when she grew angry. Her mother must have brought enormous pressure to bear upon him; perhaps he was not so much to blame then, but surely if that were so he might have told her it was her mother's doing quite simply, instead of giving it as his own opinion that her sketch must not appear. His conduct hurt her in a new way now, and the hurt growing, turned more and more to anger. She felt angry even at the thought of the trouble on his face all that afternoon.

"He need n't have made me conscious of what our friendship has been to me, just when he is becoming disloyal to father and to me too."

It seemed so hard to lose his companionship in the ideal world of which her father was the centre. One thing was certain, she would never be tempted to such disloyalty herself. She would accept no compromise, however much it hurt her, whatever she had to sacrifice, even—even Stephen's friendship. She would be loyal at all costs. If her mother and Stephen would not do her father justice, she would live to honour his memory. She might not be able to do much now besides publishing that little sketch, but as she grew older and her powers developed she would devote herself to the work of making people understand what her father had been. Stephen might choose Mrs. Blake's side and give way to her bitter prejudice against religion, but if so he must give up his friend-

ship with Trix. Had she, perhaps, a subtle, unacknowledged sense of her own power over Stephen, while she sat on such heroic heights of self-sacrifice? Poor Trix!

She at last got up and lit a candle, and proved to herself the reality of her heroic sentiments by writing a few stiff lines to Stephen asking for the return of her MS. That done, she put the letter for privacy's sake into the handkerchief sachet in her drawer. Besides, there was no danger of its being posted while it lay there, and lie there it did for several days. After such definite action as that it was easier to fall asleep. When she came down late next morning her aunt had gone out, which was a relief. Trix made herself fresh tea and drank it with the solid background of bread and jam. Then she went out on the common in a drizzling rain and a sighing, fateful wind. As she tramped on for miles across the common it grew gradually more and more exciting to have decided that she, Trix, aged eighteen, had come to the one love affair of her life, whether it was to be unhappy or not. Trix had never dreamed it would come so soon or be like this. She did n't face the question squarely as to Stephen's feelings towards herself, because if she once began to examine that point she might get too near to it and have doubts. So though she told herself that she was very likely to be going to be very unhappy she really had Stephen's feelings towards her in a golden mist at the back of her mind. She came in very wet and ravenously hungry.

Trix had no idea of the extent of the irritation she had caused Aunt Anne of late. As long as she did not interfere and expect her to keep all sorts of old rules, she had meant to be nice to her. Of course she had

been odious last night about Stephen, but probably that was mother's doing. On anything to do with her father, her mother's ideas were sure to be paramount with Aunt Anne.

Sitting with her at luncheon Trix suddenly began to wonder if Aunt Anne had had any romance of her own. Happily she did not try to raise the point in conversation. They talked of the garden, of the scenery in the Highlands, and Anne rather enjoyed Trix's account of Mrs. Shenstone's guests and their appreciation of the glories of nature. Trix had been late for luncheon, and there was not much time that need be spent together. Afterwards Trix fell sound asleep on her bed, and did not wake till supper-time. Mrs. Blake had not arrived—only a telegram to say that she could not get away for several days. Those days were not really deeply unhappy for Trix. They were like a wild dream of open air, of all sorts of weather, of excitement that had not come to a reaction. She could not sit still for long. She was quiet in manner, but, as her aunt observed to her one day, "absolutely in the moon." She felt and looked like a heroine, which annoyed Aunt Anne though it was really very harmless. She was only a heroine to herself, because she was in love and was ready to sacrifice that love for higher ends.

But she woke one morning with a sense of depression. The excitement was going off, and by breakfast-time she told herself that she was very miserable. A walk only made her realise it more. After all, what had she been so happy about? Was it anything but a one-sided affair, and, if so, rather humiliating than glorious? What had Stephen ever said that could make her believe that—that—in fact— She cov-

ered her cheeks with her hands and felt very tired. She dragged herself home, hardly pretended to eat at luncheon, and sat down wearily to an old novel in the afternoon. It is trying to live on internal excitement with no external happenings. She was longing for something to happen, she wanted to begin being heroic or to begin being happy. The novel was not much use as a distraction, and tea only made her more awake. It seemed that Stephen took things quietly enough; perhaps he had almost forgotten the existence of her sketch. She had told him that nobody could prevent her from publishing it, and that if it could not appear as a book it should appear as an article. And yet he had not returned it. It was treating her like a child. If he did not think she ought to publish it, he might have remonstrated with her, but to keep the MS. quite coolly without apology or explanation was intolerable. Her thoughts were interrupted by the parlour-maid, who, appearing in the open doorway, asked if there were any letters for post as the gardener was leaving early to take the pony to be shod in the village.

Trix jumped up.

"Yes, I have a letter," she said, "I 'll fetch it. Have you got a stamp?"

The letter, written in the wakeful heroic hours, was snatched out of the sachet in which it had been hidden. It was not glanced at again, and it was soon in the gardener's pocket on its way to the post-office.

XV

SHE WAS HIS LAST CONQUEST

STEPHEN had taken one last look round the station vainly seeking for Trix, who had been hurried off to a farther platform to catch her train for home. The impossibility of saying "good-bye" made him feel absurdly as if he had lost her for good and all.

"My God!" he muttered, frowning gloomily out of the window of the taxi. It was astonishing to himself how much he minded. He had thought so coolly of the difficulties there might be with regard to Trix and the Life; and then he had met her; he had made her angry; he had not been able to say "good-bye" to her; and the whole castle in the air, the great Life of Blake, the biography that would take the name of Tempest with that of Blake down the ages, or, anyhow, up into the best book-shelves—the whole thing lay a mass of rubbish at his feet. "Absurd, ridiculous," he might say later on. Just now he could see nothing ridiculous in the obvious fact that nothing mattered except Trix. She seemed to be sitting opposite to him, the angry, beautiful, suffering little face refusing to look at him, the slight figure quivering with wrath, one foot kicking nervously in front of her.

He got home, climbed up the heights, paying no attention to something the porter told him, and found himself in his room. The room seemed to him bare, dusty, unendurable. He hated the vast outlook on

the great emptiness beyond, the endless, endless roofs below him. Most he hated the bureau and the chest of drawers and the cupboard in the wall and one small unopened packing-case all of which were quite full with materials for Blake's Life. He soon got away downstairs, and then he walked and walked. He was frantic at the position he had got into. From the moment he had seen Trix he had felt that he was a traitor, and now he vowed to be loyal with an incoherence that ignored all facts. He was still in a state of excitement that he dimly felt to be intolerable when he dined in an upper room at a restaurant in Soho. As he came down the narrow stair, escorted by the parting bow of the well-tipped waiter, to his great disgust he saw Edward Hales getting into his coat by the revolving glass door leading into the street. He stopped and wondered if it were too late to go up again and lie hid for a few minutes. But a waiter coming to push Hales farther into his worn coat, by the energy of his ministrations turned the latter towards the staircase. The rough-hewn clever face with its red beard looked up at Stephen.

"The great biographer," he said grimly, nodding at the young man. Hales took it for granted that they would walk away together. Stephen had so persistently sought his society that it never occurred to him that he could not want to walk with him to-night. They passed down a dingy street, past two eating-houses where raw meat sat on plates in the window, adding its allurement to that of oysters and large cauliflowers. Stephen could not speak. Hales did not until they had walked some way on.

"Well," he said, "how are you getting on?"

"I 'm not getting on at all," grumbled Stephen. "I 've been down to the country for the week-end."

"I love this part of London," said Hales. "People here love good cooking and good music, and more or less say what they mean. They are of all tongues and creeds, and so they always were. It is the British tradition of cosmopolitanism—not a mushroom growth like the Jews of the Mile End Road."

Not an attempt at an answer. Hales began to notice Stephen. He certainly looked unlike his usual self, the self of the young barrister recently at Oxford, doing well in the world; he looked ill, heavy, suffering —above all, angry.

At last he broke the silence.

"I 'm not going to write that book," he said in a furious voice.

Hales was so exceedingly disappointed that he took the thing literally and seriously at once, which was undiplomatic. He argued and he stormed without waiting for an explanation. His erratic and irresponsible imagination had caught on to this idea of the book Stephen could make if he chose. Before stopping to make out what the new obstacles were he chafed and swore at them. The only good points he made that produced any effect on Stephen were first that, after all, he had undertaken to do it and had no right to go back upon it; and secondly, that if he did not do it, it would be given to somebody else who might make a preposterous thing of it—a windy, blustering caricature, and give away the whole show.

Stephen did not answer, hardly seemed to listen as they walked on through Trafalgar Square, past the Abbey in the direction of Victoria Station.

Hales at last growled out that he would take him no

farther out of his way, and Stephen stood stock-still as the tall figure of the old don disappeared, striding quickly, and tapping the pavement with a gnarled stick in an angry hand.

Presently becoming conscious of his own stillness Stephen walked hastily away. He had not intended to tell Hales that he would give up the job, but he had quite suddenly felt the need to speak out. It would be a comfort to get settled, to clear this horrid thing away that lay between him and Trix. An hour later he was sitting in his dressing-gown in the stiff easy-chair by the wide window, looking out at all London twinkling its lights below him, and the quieter light of stars above.

What was Trix doing? Sad lonely champion for her ideal, loyal and true as steel in defence of her father. No one understood her, the strange mother so unlike the child with her stern magnetic face, weather-worn, a bit battered, and no wonder; how could she understand the fresh, young pain of Trix?

And did it solve the difficulty, take away the obstacle for him to throw up the work and let it be given to somebody else? Would that draw Trix to him, bring them together? Would it save her suffering if the job were given to somebody she did n't know, and who would care nothing about her? He could imagine Mrs. Blake and some literary hireling making the book if he refused to write it. Trix then—he squirmed at the thought—would break off by herself and publish the poor pitiful sketch with its pathetic simplicity—the simplicity of genius, a thing that might seem childish and absurd to the coarse, rough world. No, that must not be; he must stop that—in short, whatever else he did he could not really cut

himself out of the "*affaire* Blake" now. But in a moment he told himself that neither could he write the book he and Hales had looked to his writing. In short, he would and he would n't give it up; he could and he could n't write it; and he was very angry and very miserable. His brain was distracted and his heart was aching. He had never known such confusion of thought and such painful, hungry misery before.

It was long before he got to sleep, and he woke to his trouble as instantly as if sleep had only prevented him from finishing a sentence in his thoughts. He got up, put on his dressing-gown and went back to the sitting-room to sit in the same chair and give himself again to trying to see some solution clearly whether he liked that solution or not. It was seven o'clock, and it took him until past eight to understand the complete futility of his discourse with himself. He dressed and went out, having in view a swimming bath, a coffee-shop, and then a walk of many miles in the Hampstead Heath direction. He would be tired if he could be nothing else.

Stephen certainly felt a little better, though he would have disdained to own it, as he came back to his sitting-room late in the afternoon. He was tired enough to walk slowly up the endless steps, and felt more comfortably stupid. He would sit in the little dining-room with its western light where he had no room to keep papers. He would not have gone into the sitting-room, but he had to fetch his pipe. As he took it off the shelf he knocked over the photograph of Horace as a boy, and as he put it back it suddenly caught his unwilling attention with a sharp pain; his

eyes had met just that ethereal glance with its exquisite claim on his sympathy that he had seen in the living man. He opened a drawer and turned out some of the latest photographs taken in London. Yes, in his new knowledge, they held a sinister interpretation of his whole character; the light in the eyes had become cruel, the lips were sensual, the mystery of evil was in them. Underneath the photographs lay Trix's contribution to the biography. He threw the photographs in again and banged the drawer.

It was not long before Hales understood. Stephen gave himself away completely. He took Trix's sketch with him and asked Hales to read it; then he pretended to read a paper meanwhile. Hales spoke not a word till he had finished; he folded it up very slowly, put it back in its big envelope, and puffed at his pipe.

"It 's a very interesting case of heredity. Is this the first thing she has written?"

"Yes; she is only just eighteen."

"It is exquisite work. She was his last conquest," said Hales, and he added to himself: "And you are her first." The absolute proof to him was Stephen's unconsciousness of his self-betrayal; how could he have been astonishingly silent as to this girl in all he had told him and yet not expect Hales to put his own interpretation on that silence now that he had broken it?

"I, too, thought Blake most touching, most simple, most real. But you see I knew nothing."

"And this child was by, and you saw her father through her eyes."

"Yes; I see now how little those impressions count. I took every word and action in the most obvious way. He seemed peaceful, but, of course, his frame was

worn out; and exhaustion has often been mistaken for resignation. Had I known what I know now! But you see I started with only a dim notion of Blake as a great dramatist. I knew nothing else about him then." He paused. "Damn him!" he added.

"Yes, damn him for leaving this poor little genius of a daughter to find him out after he had enjoyed making her adore him!" Hales pointed to the big envelope on the table. "That is one of the curiosities of literature. Don't lose it, Tempest. You can't commit the hideous irony of using it, but it must not be lost."

He noticed that Stephen did not make any assertion now as to not writing the book at all.

"Still," Hales went on, "I should like to know exactly how far you went with this daughter at the time. I suppose you took the saint theory with a grain of salt?"

"Yes," said Stephen, with a sad smile. "I took it as a bit of pious rhetoric."

"But you did believe in the genuineness of the religious side?" insisted Hales.

"Yes, until I read those beastly papers. Until then it appeared to me that Blake's youth, although it was spent in a narrow intellectual atmosphere full of superstition, had in it some of the beauty of real religion that is found incidentally in the Roman Church. The home life obviously had an atmosphere of genuine beauty and purity. As he grew up it seemed to me that the ripening of genius brought about a vigorous revolt against all shams and conventionalities, and especially against the superstitions of the religion in which he had been brought up. But when his destructive work had gone far enough and in his mature

years there was to be expected the great reconstruction which should mark out the inspiring force that had succeeded to outworn superstitions, health failed and life was prematurely cut short. It was not surprising, surely, that in this failing state the atmosphere of the peaceful Breton village should come upon the fatigued mind as a soothing influence. I took for granted that the genuine and simple religion of the people had touched a chord in him which had never become insensible. Unable to effect the great intellectual reconstruction, he took the religion of the spirit—so I thought—which he detected in Brittany, and in his weariness became tolerant of the attendant superstitions that perhaps held a lingering echo of his childish days. From something he said to me when I was with him, I concluded that he fell back on Descartes's view of a *morale par provision*. Do you remember that the great French thinker held that, while the prolonged quest for intellectual truth is going on, a provisional guide for the religious needs of daily life is necessary, which can best be found in the current creed of our time and country. Such an outline was the view on which I had planned my Life of Blake. But do I bore you?"

"Go on, go on," growled Hales; "get it all out if you can."

"There is not now," Stephen went on with an effort, "any profound difference in my conception of his early years. But to those I know now there succeeded something very different from the ennobling protest against shams, conventions, and superstitions. The thorough moral corruption of the nature which followed lasted for at least twenty years. In that time there was no great ethical aim or ethical ideal;

the only great quality left was an intellectual rather than a moral one. It was the artist's instinct for depicting truly things as they are; it was no burning desire to make things better. The moral nature was wholly corrupt before disease fell upon his already worn-out constitution. By the time I met Blake in Brittany the fire of intellect must have been burning low, as was life itself. It was then that the priests worked upon him, while dreams of childhood returned. Delirium may bring back the past, and yet that past, now present, has no longer any true moral relation to the living man. I can't now see any real beauty in the end; I can't believe that the man was in any true sense himself at all. I can't depict as a touching and interesting final development of Blake's more spiritual side what was little more than the delusion of dotage. There can have been nothing in it but an ignoble clinging to superstitious rites, and a pose by which he sought to deceive himself. The serene atmosphere of a real moral conversion was absolutely impossible for a man as rotten as Blake."

There was a profound silence. The sympathy Hales felt for Stephen at that moment stirred him much beyond his wont, and feeling always made him silent. He was immensely attracted by the girl who had written that paper, and he could not, for the life of him, see any solution of the difficulty as to Stephen's work. An idea that he had once had before with regard to Blake's daughter came back to his mind and made the difficulty infinitely greater—an idea of which he had already seen that Stephen knew nothing. The girl, he thought to himself, could not live for ever in her illusions as to her father, but she would hate the man or woman whose fate it was to destroy those

illusions. Therefore he, for one, could not preach the duty of truth to Stephen to-night.

Meanwhile, it had been on Stephen's lips more than once to tell Hales of his meeting with Trix in the train and of her wrath with himself. But he checked himself. He was afraid of betraying the secret of his own feelings— the secret that he naïvely imagined that he had kept till now. He got up to go and Hales did not attempt to keep him.



XVI

I ENTREAT YOU TO FORGET IT

STEPHEN put Trix's MS. carefully away in a little drawer to itself in the bureau in the sitting-room. The talk with Hales had been a physical relief; he was more quietly wretched, and fell asleep almost at once when he got to bed. Waking sleepily, he only gradually remembered his trouble. Of course, even if he were to be wretched there were consolations. A man is not in Stephen's state of mind without roseate visions, and sudden little oases would come in the midst of a really painful aridity. The morning was gloriously fresh, but still; all the smoke from all the chimneys rose as straight to Heaven as the aspirations of saints or poets. He rather greedily caught at a bright aspect of things, as does a sick man who in the morning is so tired of suffering that he is determined he will enjoy something or other if so be he is able. He sang in his bath and dressed, and was making some tea by the cheerful aid of a gas-ring, when the sound of the postman's knock came pleasantly. Tempest went to the front door of the flat and took three letters out of the box. Two he flung on a table near him and hurried into the sitting-room to read the third.

It consisted of three stiff, cold lines from Trix, asking him to return the MS. she had sent him. The little note stung him to the quick; he dropped it on the ground, picked it up and looked at it again. He had hardly understood the postscript:

"I think I shall try the *Northern Review.*"

Trix seemed to have receded miles and miles away from him. "The *Northern Review!* Who had put that into her head?"

He went to the bureau and pulled out the MS. "She shall have it by return of post then." That would just be the end; she would go her own way. Little, independent Trix would act with strangers, and provoke by herself a violent reaction against Blake by publishing her lovely miniature. There must be plenty of sleeping dogs who would proceed to wake up tired of their own silence at the time of Blake's death. It was obvious to Stephen, with the little room in which he stood crammed with the record of a rotten, ugly life, that quite a number of people must know enough of it to jeer at this filial process of canonisation.

Let Trix throw that sketch into a magazine without any dressing up, without a man-of-the-world's presentation of it, without any acknowledgment at all that Blake had not always been thus, and—well! he could hear the roar of sardonic laughter that could not be suppressed. And those who knew their public would present their laughter in a literary form, and then——!

But very gradually another idea began to dawn upon him. The process of taking one's self in is not easily analysed. Pictures growing more distinct appeared to Stephen of the perfectly gentlemanly Life he *could* write of Blake. Not the ideal Life, not the Life he had planned with Trix, but the friend-of-the-family, man-of-the-world's book. The man-of-the-world book would open with the ideal youth, and then would make a frank acknowledgment, minus all concrete facts, that the great dramatist had not been,

in the stress of his vigorous life, what could be called a good man. But it would insist that he had been what was of more consequence to the world—a very great man. The large bulk of the book would be taken up with his dramatic work, keeping skilfully in the foreground the noblest of his creations. Then, returning to the personal aspect—the break-up of his health, his courage in working to the end would be dwelt upon. The Breton atmosphere would be useful, the note of simplicity (which he now forgot had so annoyed him in the obituary notices) would be pressed upon, leading up to the introduction of Trix's paper. The biographer would offer to the public the daughter's impressions just for what they were worth, as a conclusion, gently suggesting for those who could read between the lines that this was a picture of the end as seen through the loving eyes of a daughter. He was sure he could catch the tone; nothing that could be contradicted, because nothing would be definitely asserted. An unwillingness would be expressed to publish the sketch, but it would be suggested that it was impossible to suppress anything so exquisite and so human. The English public would be touched, just as Stephen's mother had been touched. He knew exactly how it could be done. There would not be a verbal lie in it. Were there not precedents? What right had anybody to make a public confession for a dead man? Was there no such thing left as decency and reticence? How could it be right to publish the horrid stuff Mrs. Blake ought never to have sent him? There was no good in a chronicle of scandals. After all, every work of art had its own economy. He seemed to hold in his hand the book that he could give to Trix and she could

take; and then he seemed to see two long volumes that the world chortled over and that separated him from Trix for ever.

Why should he make such a sacrifice as his own happiness just for the sake of realism? It was nothing else. All day the thing went on, and all day he receded farther and farther away from his own habitual standards, from the creed of his intellectual life. The conclusion was obvious. Once only did he really stop, really pull himself up. It came to him quite clearly for a few minutes that he must simply resign the whole thing, and tell Trix that it made him miserable to give it up, but that he found it impossible to go on. Then he would trust to the future proving his friendship to her, trust, too, to the discoveries that she, poor child, must make in time, to justify him. "Because, after all," he thought, "the man who takes on the job will find it all out too. Perhaps he will chuck it.

> "'After me cometh a builder,
> Tell him I, too, have known.'"

The clear moment was soon confused by the old reasons. Trix must be saved from herself; another man must not be allowed to add to her suffering. "*Advienne que pourra*" was too hard a saying for Stephen just now.

And so he sat down in his club, where the aspect of things was cushioned with conventionality, and wrote to Trix. He was in a hurry, it seemed, and he was as red as if he were ashamed. He wrote then in haste, saying that he had quite changed his view as to the difficulty of using her contribution. He should insist to Mrs. Blake that it must be put in bodily; it was so

vivid, he added, and so lifelike that it must stand alone. Then as he wrote his pen really ran away with him in his anxiety to please her and to do away with the dreadful effect their last talk had left on her. "As to the rest of what I said when we met in the train," he added, "I entreat you to forget it. If ever you write a biography and have to deal with every letter written under a momentary impulse, and often representing no more than that impulse, you will find that the biographer, like his subject, must go through different moods. I am convinced that the Life must be in great part what we planned in the Highlands, and I think, again and again, of our talks there as my best inspiration which will be with me constantly until I have finished the work."

Stephen ran down the steps of the club, smiling to himself. The thing was done, settled—and he could now enjoy life again. But he had unfortunately for his comfort an intellectual conscience which many most excellent people have not. It is, no doubt, greatly a question of education. Truth in literature may be the instinct of men of genius at any date; it presents itself as a stern duty to the ordinary cultivated intelligence only in an advanced state of civilisation. Stephen had the standards that are flaunted by the modern journalist, and a conscience that insisted that he should live up to them. But there were other virtues. Loyalty to a woman, for instance, was certainly a virtue. He wanted just to be happy and young this evening, and be hanged to his career and to the great biography. Ordinary life and its duties and joys and sorrows would be enough to fill Stephen Tempest's share of time. But pleasure is freakish, and somehow she neglected Stephen that

evening. He went to the play, and just before reaching the theatre he saw Hales's gaunt figure not far off. He had an instinctive movement towards avoiding him, and then thought that Hales had exactly the same movement as to himself. He felt annoyed at noticing this; why should Hales avoid him? Through the first act of the play the thought of Hales bothered him. It was all very well for Hales to have that wonderful biography in his mind; a dry old person who could n't possibly conceive that the happiness of a woman mattered rather more than a realistic biography. Hales knew nothing of the letter to Trix, but Stephen seemed to hear stinging comments on it issuing from the rough loose lips, made bitter by the contempt in the sleepy, kind eyes.

Yet Hales had, in fact, avoided him this evening, from the same motive that had kept him silent the other night. He could not preach truth to Stephen, and so he would rather let him alone. He himself would never have dreamed of being false to love for the sake of cold, intellectual truth in the old days, when his impossible aspirations had kept him night after night watching the woman act for whom Blake had written his best work. It seemed to him now that there had been giants in those days, and he thought kindly of such lesser mortals as Stephen and the girl who had written that exquisite sketch of Blake's last days. After Stephen passed into the theatre Hales turned back and stood opposite to its pseudo-classic portico and dreamed a little. It was not really so very long ago, but it was all the vast space between youth and the beginning of the end of life. Night after night he had taken the seat in the middle of the front dress-circle—it had been his own practically whenever

she was acting. He had always bought a programme just to see in print before the curtain went up the name of Nancy Potter. And the biographer to whom so much had been revealed knew nothing of the sorrows of Nancy Potter. How quickly the memory of her had faded in the public mind! Even Blake's Life would not revive the fame of his victim, and that were better so. The woman for whom *Puritan Anne* had been written would not have had it otherwise. He passed on at last with a sigh towards the music-hall which was his object that evening. He had no notion that he represented to Stephen the stern mentor of the intellectual conscience.

Stephen did not enjoy himself much. He thought the play stupid, written to encourage the tricks that had spoilt a great actor, now adored by a public that loves the caricature of a once fine personality. He began quite suddenly to feel anxious and wretched. It was all very well, but that Life had to be written, and now it suddenly seemed impossible to carry out the low task of the man-of-the-world sort of book. He went out before the end and had supper somewhere. The detective of fiction must have seen the discomfort of guilt in his mien. Truth is a very merciless mistress and will be revenged for desertion.

XVII

MY CHILD

TRIX had lost all interest, so she told herself, in the postman's bell; she had had fancies about letters, but they were over now.

And then, out of the dark grey came the letter from Stephen Tempest; a letter that undid all that horrible episode in the train. What could it mean? She could hardly read the words. He wanted, he insisted on using her paper after all.

"I am convinced," he wrote, "that the Life must be in great part what we planned in the Highlands; our talks there are my best inspiration."

The joy flooded over her. It was all right then—not that he had said a word of his own feelings, but it was all as it had been before the dreadful misunderstanding—her father's Life, Stephen's ideal of him, Stephen's friendship with herself. She hurried out again into the garden, and then came in for her hat. With head high and flushed cheeks and shining eyes she walked into the village and bought some foolscap. Perhaps she could write a little more that might be of use.

As she came along the narrow street a very small boy with a cheeky face looked up at her and uttered the one word "swank." It was his way of remarking on the fact that Trix's light young figure seemed to be curiously expressive of triumph.

Anne Coniston saw, of course, that something of an

exceedingly pleasing nature had become known to Trix, and, as it was something that must have been made known to her through the post, she did not want much shrewdness in order to connect it with Stephen Tempest. Then also, during the few hours they had spent together each day, Trix had unconsciously conveyed to Anne that the chief feature of the visit to the Highlands had been Stephen Tempest himself. Also it slipped out that they had met again in the train, and Anne felt that it would have been more natural if Trix had mentioned the meeting on the first evening of her return. Then Trix began to write again, rather ostentatiously, letting large sheets of foolscap lie about on the floor of her room, and warning the little housemaid not to touch them in a voice of some importance. Anne determined to take no notice of what she was doing, as Kate must come back soon. Meanwhile she and Trix jogged along, falling into the habits of past kindness. Trix helped her aunt in small matters in house and garden, and in the care of the live-stock, which consisted of chickens, two dogs, a cat and two birds. Anne's annoyance slumbered or smouldered; she did not know herself which process it was going through. She found herself laughing at old jokes about queer neighbours rich and poor that Trix brought up afresh, with a happy ring in her laugh.

Kate had intended, when she went to London chiefly in order to see Horace's publishers, to look at the same time at a few houses and compare the rents in different quarters. But she had gone much farther than a merely tentative inquiry. She had been asked to see the house of a friend of the George Shenstones in Eccleston Square. The house appeared to be ex-

actly what she wanted—roomy, sunny, quiet. She intended to think it over at her leisure when she found that she must either take it at once or risk losing it altogether. So, at least, the trustworthy agents assured her.

From day to day she hoped to finish the weary business, and from day to day she found it impossible to get away. This house in London was part of Anne Coniston's grievance. It was for Trix's sake that Kate was taking this house instead of going abroad with herself. She knew that Kate meant to make a position for Trix as a grown-up girl immediately, and without the risk of delay, while people still had the name of Blake constantly in their minds. It seemed intolerable to her that Kate, who for so many years had never been free to go her own way and have a life of her own, should be at once obliged to take up this burden of making a life for Trix.

It was not until she noticed a large registered envelope lying on the hall-table one evening, addressed to Stephen Tempest, that she saw clearly as daylight what the girl had been doing. She had been helping Stephen Tempest again, for although Kate had been as reserved as usual and had not told Anne about Trix's paper, she had been fairly sure as to what was the difficulty that hurt Kate so much.

Trix was feeling particularly happy this evening. She had no sense of guilt about the registered envelope lying in the hall. There was nothing in it that anybody could mind. It only gave scraps of her father's talk about his childhood, his happy and happy-go-lucky education, his father and mother and Mary. Then, too, she had put down things he had said about books, about great authors and little authors, and she

even had recorded some cheerful, silly little jokes—while a few tears fell upon the paper.

But talking with Aunt Anne at supper that evening was heavy going, like walking on a ploughed field. After supper and coffee Anne took up a book. Presently she looked over it at Trix, who was lying back in a deep chair gazing into the fire with smiling eyes.

"You have been very busy writing these last days."

"Yes."

Trix blushed.

"Are you sending what you have written to Mr. Tempest?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"It is something more I have written for him."

"You mean that it is something for the Life?"

"Yes," Trix answered quickly. "It is things that father told me about himself, and about his mother and his sister, and about books." She hurried out what seemed to her such a harmless category.

Anne was silent. At last she said abruptly:

"So you were writing about your father all that time in September?"

"Yes, Aunt Anne, did n't you know? I wrote a great deal. I thought that if I wrote down all that happened while I was alone with my father it might be of use to Mr. Tempest. Nobody else knows how wonderful father was during those last weeks, except me. You see," she went on, rushing on to the most delicate ground unconscious of her danger; "no one else was with him."

There was intense pity and yearning in her tone as she said those last words, but also a little self-importance which Anne magnified.

"I could say how he bore all those terrible sufferings and how unselfish he was. Even if I put it badly, I thought Mr. Tempest could use it and re-write it, but——"

"Why did you send it to him without telling your mother?"

"I thought it might be painful to her because——"

"Because?" repeated Anne.

"Because she was not there," blundered Trix, "and because she would not like the religious part."

"And so you sent to Mr. Tempest what you knew she would not like?"

Anne was standing now. She had moved near the window.

"It was all true," said Trix doggedly.

"You had no right to interfere," said Anne. "You behaved very badly in sending it to Mr. Tempest without our having seen it. If you had had some consideration, some feeling for her, you must have known that your father's wife was the only person who had any rights in the matter. If you had had any thought for her——"

"Mother has not had much thought for me," said Trix very slowly. "She left me alone all that time, and then—" She began to cry. "You have neither of you thought at all for me all through; you did not think I had even the right to be unhappy."

Anne Coniston was standing by the window, her lips almost as white as her face. All the resentment that had been at the bottom of her mind ever since Kate first put Trix into her arms was surging over her now, it was becoming almost past her own control.

"You think I have no rights, but you are wrong," continued Trix. "I know how he loved me, and I am

the only one who knows anything about the end of his life, and it would not be right to keep it to myself. If mother won't put it in the biography, I will send it somewhere as an article; nobody can prevent me."

"You would n't—you could n't dare to do that!"

"I will."

"You are determined to do this?"

"Absolutely determined. I have told him so already."

"You won't be influenced by Kate's wishes, by the thought of the pain you will give her?"

Anne was in reality driving Trix to put her back to the wall, but she did not know that that was what she wished to do.

"The truth must come out, it ought to come out," said Trix doggedly.

"Then, my poor child," said Anne in a low voice, "I must tell you what you ought to have been told long ago."

Trix was frightened by her tone, and yet felt as if she had known before whatever her aunt might say.

"My poor child," Anne repeated. She was trying to convince herself by her words and her altered tone, of her own kindness towards Trix.

She sat down with her face turned away from the flushed and tearful girl sunk in the big chair.

"If you had tried to behave like a daughter to Kate the state of things might be possible. From the first I thought it very wrong to deceive you, and the person who ought to have refused to allow you to be deceived was your father. Kate did it to save your father's reputation and out of compassion for —for—" She paused.

"Be quick," said Trix, "who was it out of compassion for?"

Anne was frightened.

"Who was it out of compassion for, Aunt Anne?"

"For your real mother."

"Be quick," repeated Trix mechanically, "who was my mother?"

"Nancy Potter."

"The actress?"

"She acted in your father's plays."

"Be quick," said Trix, "where was I born? How did your sister conceal the truth?"

"Kate wanted to make reparation for Horace's treatment of Nancy Potter, so she took her away. I think it was because your father showed so little pity that Kate took it all upon herself. It was announced that they would travel together in America; she was to act in New York—not in one of your father's plays, she refused to act anything of his again. When they had been some time in New York, they went very far West where no one knew them, and there they changed their names. Six months afterwards Kate brought you in here and put you in my arms."

"Why did n't you kill me then? Where was my mother?"

"She was dead, and in dying she made Kate promise that you should never be left alone with your father."

"Be quick," said Trix again, as if her brain worked purely mechanically, and then she was able to faint.

When she became conscious she was in bed, and the doctor was watching her. He was startled at the horrified pain and humiliation in her face. She had

known him ever since she could remember anything. She held out a small, imploring hand.

"Dr. Anderson, will you take me away?"

"My dear Trix," he said gently.

"Oh, take me away," she cried again; and then the tears burst forth. There was a slight noise at the door.

"Don't let me see her. I need n't see her, need I?"

"I can't tell her not to come in, in her own house," he said weakly.

Trix shut her eyes and clenched her fists as the door opened.

"Mrs. Blake," said Dr. Anderson.

Kate did not seem to notice him; she moved quickly, noiselessly to the other side of the bed and knelt down and put her arms round Trix.

"My child," she cried, in a tone of infinite tenderness.

And Trix clung to her weeping. All the lost maternal power in Kate, wasted hitherto, was alive. She held the weeping girl with a strength of possessive love. Touch was her power of expression now; she tried no other. And Trix did not shrink, only a generous nature, as generous as Kate's own, could have endured to receive that touch. But Trix knew by the instinct of true human kindness that by opening her heart to Kate now she could make some return for all the agony she had caused her. The wounded animal would fain have crept into a hole to die, but the soul rose to receive the full burden of Kate's enormous, heroic mistake. Any debt can be repaid by love.

At last, with a supreme effort, the child managed to say:

"Mother, need I——?"

She had never said "Mother" like that before.

"Need you what, my darling?"

"Need I see her?"

"Certainly not."

Then Kate went to fetch back Dr. Anderson, who had left the room.

"It is better now mother has come?" was his most unfortunate remark.

A sickly smile was forced on Trix's white face.

"Oh, yes," she murmured.

"She is not ill, you know," said Dr. Anderson in a puzzled voice, when he came down-stairs; "but I think I would humour her in every way you can. And a change now; could she have a change?"

"She must sleep to-night somehow," said Kate with decision.

He consented against his will to give her a sedative, but she was asleep from exhaustion before it arrived.

Kate would not speak to the now miserable and repentant Anne. All these years, utterly against the grain, Anne had brought up Horace Blake's illegitimate child, and all through those years the dull, blind exasperation had never been extinguished. To-night's work had been the outcome of eighteen years of self-repression. She had done it all for Kate's sake, and Kate would not forgive her.

Two days later Stephen received a letter addressed in a writing that puzzled him. It was so like and yet so unlike Trix's writing. He tore it open; it was from Trix, but the writing was untidy and blotted:

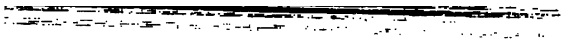
"DEAR MR. TEMPEST,

"I ought not to have interfered as to the biography you are writing. Please burn what I sent you and forget it. You must be guided entirely by mother's wishes,

"Yours truly,

"TRIX BLAKE."

He put it down—the piteous, crooked little scrawl. Oh! what had they done to her, those hard women? How had they conquered her so completely and so quickly? It made him furious to think what might have been done to make her come round like this. Not to him, oh, no; she was not turning to him—the stiff "Yours truly" showed that plainly enough. Poor darling child, they must have hurt her with horrible revelations as to her father's life, and she would feel that he was one with her torturers. All that fiery light in her eyes and her lovely flushed face, how had they extinguished it? Angry with him or not, he would rather have her so than crushed. How shaky the writing looked, how unlike her usual writing. Was there no one to comfort her, no one to understand what disillusion as to her father could mean to her? They had not even allowed her the right to mourn him directly after his death, they had shown her no sympathy, they would show her no sympathy now in a loss far greater than death—the loss of her ideal. And was he to stand by and do nothing to help her? Yes, because she did not want his help, because it was Horace's own doing—Horace's past that cut her off in her misery. Stephen could not put the statue up again on its pedestal and so Trix would have no use for him.





PART III

I

THAT DOES N'T MATTER

KATE was standing in the dining-room of her new house in Eccleston Square in the midst of chaos. Pictures stood against the walls, the sideboard showed its unpolished and dreary back in the very middle of the room, the dinner-table was in sections, blocking up the fireplace, the chairs, covered in sackcloth, were stacked in the window, and a rolled Turkey carpet was the only available seat. On it Trix was seated bending forward to lift some books out of a packing-case.

"Shall these go to your sitting-room or the drawing-room?"

"My sitting-room," said Kate.

"After I 've loaded that tray we ought to go and get some luncheon," said Trix. "You are looking very white, mother."

"Black I should have thought," said Kate, extending her hands. "We will go if you will come up first to choose the covers for your own rooms."

There was the faintest tremor in Kate's voice.

"I wish you would choose for me," said Trix lightly; "you have much better taste."

Kate turned away, suppressing a sigh. If only Trix would take the faintest interest in her own rooms!

"I 'm sure the heliotrope coloured thing will look best in your bedroom," Trix called after her.

Presently, as Kate did not return, Trix followed her.

"Now, mother—" she began.

"I am only putting this pottery in a safe place. They are going to lay your carpet to-day."

Kate's hands were full of Breton pottery. Trix took the things from her rather rashly.

"To luncheon you shall come," she said. As the pottery changed hands a little *bénitier* fell to the ground and was broken.

"Oh, that does n't matter," said Trix quickly. "I meant to sell it with the others at some bazaar this winter; it would not have fetched much. Now do come."

So they hurried away to the club, ate a hasty luncheon, and soon returned to the scene of action.

There were moments when this unpacking became almost unbearable to Kate. Perhaps the thing that hurt most was the hanging of the Surot portrait in her own sitting-room. She had seen it in the artist's studio, but now she was to live with it, and as the men raised it above the chimney-piece and asked her at what height it was to be fixed she felt as if she would rather tell them to take it out of her sight. It was terribly living, terribly like Horace as she had seen him last. Surot had known that he was painting a condemned man, and he had not concealed it, but he had given the intense impression of vitality and the slightest smile of triumph on the mouth and of contempt in the great light eyes. It dominated the little room so absolutely, but it must stay there. She could not let it dominate the room in which she and Trix were to live together.

It took a long time to fix it, and then the men who

had brought it from the studio went away. Kate sat down on a stool feeling incapable of further action. How was she to live with that painted thing that taunted her with her loneliness? Did other women really find comfort in pictures of their dead? She never could. Trix had come into the doorway; Kate turned round to speak to her, but she had already gone.

"Tea is on the packing-case—come and have it," she cried from the dining-room. Kate came and sat by her on the roll of Turkey carpet, and Trix made her admire the neatness of the spread on the packing-case. Kate took her tea and smiled affectionately. She wondered as she sipped it whether their life, when they were settled, could be as bad as this horrible, dreary arranging for it. She had chosen a house larger than their needs required, as she wanted Trix and herself to have plenty of space at their disposal. There was to be not only a sitting-room for each, but each was to have a spare room for her own special guests. Trix, always helpful, always considerate and indefatigable, seemed all the time like a kind little visitor, who had no real connection with what was going on. Would the silence as to any deeper things in which they were passing their days ever be broken? She was putting down her empty tea-cup when she saw that Trix was cutting the wrappings off a stack of chairs.

"Don't lift those, Trix."

"Done," said Trix, putting two chairs on the floor and revealing an old leather couch. "Now there you are to rest until Maple's men are so kind as to come with the other carpets, and I am going round to the post-office. I want cleaner air than this."

Kate did as she was bid and sank back on the couch. She heard the front door bang as Trix went out, and her thoughts still busied themselves about her. To-day she was feeling profoundly discouraged. After every emotional crisis there is a tendency to reaction. Kate had lived on mountain heights of feeling in the days that followed Anne's wicked blundering betrayal of the secret to Trix, but the exaltation could not last. For eighteen years there had been the strain of the false position. Kate before that had hungered for a child with an agonised hunger. And then she had of her own motion put upon herself this horrible burden. She had always felt intense repugnance to the idea of adopting a child and yet she had taken into her arms the child of Horace's most inexcusable sin. Acute jealousy of other women was passed before she had witnessed the long struggle and the fall in the unequal combat between Horace and Nancy Potter. She had been merciful before but not pitiful, as she was to the girl who never lifted her head after the shame of her sin. Kate knew the reality of Nancy Potter's repentance, recognised the depths of the shame that was so soon to kill the woman who had made London wild with admiration by her acting of Puritan Anne. Nancy had shrunk from Horace's wife, but Kate had been undaunted. She had so identified herself with Horace that it seemed as if she were the offender, Nancy the injured, in their intercourse together. She could remember distinctly the moment when the strange scheme of self-effacement had first struck her. Nancy had told her that she would be a mother in the spring. Kate saw the publicity, the horrors of the scandal if the world should realise that Nancy Potter had acted

her own story in *Puritan Anne*. She knew at once that for this Horace could never be forgiven; she knew too that Nancy could never lift her head again. It seemed obvious to try to save them both, but the necessary sacrifice was that of her own maternal feelings; her feelings as a wife had been tortured enough, but the mother's feelings had hitherto been left, if unfulfilled, a sacred though empty part of her nature. Kate would have to pretend, and she hated pretence, that this child born in despair and shame was her own baby, the little glorified baby that for years had been a vision in her innermost mind. And when the trial came it proved worse than she expected.

Nancy died as a penitent; her religious expressions meant little to Kate, but the woman's longing to be free from stain appealed to her intensely. Kate was with her when she died in the far west of America. She kissed her cold forehead with passionate tenderness, and then turning, saw that the old servant who had never left Nancy was holding out the baby for her to take it. It was, of course, not the first time she had seen the child, and had seen, or imagined, a likeness to Horace—but this time the repulsion was overwhelming. The nurse understood, and when they had to part for Kate to go back to England she implored to be allowed to keep the baby.

Kate never knew if that would not really have been the better way, but even then it was too late: the announcement of its birth had appeared already—Trix to the world was the child of the wife of Horace Blake.

Kate had left Horace in a state of mind that she only understood. He was resisting remorse after his own fashion, deliberately living in his work, writing

incessantly, talking of nothing but the next play, forcing himself to speak of a great play to be written for Nancy Potter to act in the autumn, ignoring everything he could ignore, but watching Kate intensely and with astonishment. She knew that if she had been anybody else, Horace would have written a play with herself for the heroine, but, thank Heaven, he had some reverence left. When she came back, he ignored Trix utterly. He was changed; Kate was convinced he had been doing strange things to get the best of that fight with remorse; besides, she knew that she could never leave him long without his sinking lower. She had come back to a hard, full life, and she calmly shouldered her burden again. A play had failed. Horace for some time wrote nothing that took a hold on the public. He had not saved much from the proceeds of his success of the previous year.

Anne Coniston undertook Trix from the first. In the years of her babyhood Kate had no anxiety about her, but as time passed she felt that she had no response ready for the instinctive demands of the childish eyes that were filled with a strange light. Kate hated a false position, and she hated to fail in duty. She hated the thought that Trix would know that she had not a mother like other mothers. She tried to use her poor, stunted maternal instincts; sometimes she did well, but often she failed, and was pitiable in her own eyes. She could not tell if it would be better or worse if Horace cared for Trix. She did not know that he acted a part out of consideration for her. He often put difficulties in the way of seeing Trix, but when she was with them the little girl gained upon him half unconsciously to him-

self. Horace, in spite of an enormous region of conscious sensations and artistic sympathies cultivated to the very utmost, had large regions of subconscious activity also. But when his last illness came and the great dread made him long for something and somebody different to distract him from himself, the submerged paternal instinct had come uppermost and he had claimed Trix. Then Kate, in spite of a large submission, knew that for herself this was the worst. It was not the jealousy that wants to punish, to inflict suffering, it was only the infinite pain of seeing Horace, at the very end, in their short evening, send her away and put the child of Nancy Potter in her place.

All that Kate was able to do for Trix after his death she did, but she was not able to break silence, not able to weep together with her. Her anguish and her knowledge belonged to herself alone. Then as time passed and Trix showed more and more the shallow romance of her little grief, betraying her loneliness with a dramatic instinct to the onlookers, Kate felt the old horror of her failure to be the child's mother.

At last the great deeps were broken up, the sacrilege of the false position came to an end. Nancy Potter's child understood, and was it not the deep, unutterable gratitude of the dying mother that shone in Trix's face, conquering with strange magnanimity the anguish and the shame? Gratitude to Kate had conquered in Nancy the shame of her motherhood, it conquered in Trix the shame of the knowledge of her birth. The false position was at an end; there need be no more acting, no more forcing of the feelings. And, therefore, as they were unbidden, they came at last. Kate could love Trix now, and she was aston-

ished as she asked herself whether a mother's love could be very different to this. They said so little of what was filling their thoughts, and Kate was intensely anxious; she almost wished for an illness with its recovery as safer than this brave silence. Trix was not ill, only a little pale. She moved alertly, she seemed to be always moving, yet she never owned to being tired. It was difficult to find out how she slept. Then gradually the silence that had been so eloquent became mysterious and at length quite dumb. The devotion to Kate was as convincing as ever—indeed, it never struck either of them to doubt it again.

Trix's whole attitude was very sympathetic to Kate; it was brave and firm, nothing puling, no false shame. But what she could not tell in her heart was what the child felt about her father. Kate shrank utterly from the question. What was passing in Trix's mind, while she held her small head so erect, that might be an insult to Horace's memory? To Kate, with her terrible fidelity, that would be almost unbearable. Well, but it must be borne; she had borne with Nancy Potter's horror of her seducer, she must bear with Trix's horror of her father. She had seen her face to-day when she avoided looking at his picture.

But she would not fancy things; she would bury the question in her own mind. Mercifully Trix had never been unattractive to her, even when she had tried her most. Now it was at moments almost a satisfaction to realise her likeness to her father.

No word passed Trix's lips as to the biography, as to Stephen, as to what she herself had written for it. Only words, and they a few, had told her what Trix felt towards herself. She watched for any indication,

however slight, that would help to explain. She had looked out curiously for any symptoms of the religious ideas that had been caught by Trix on that Breton coast, but she could see none at all.

To-day the discouragement that had been growing in her mind was brought strongly before her because she had seen and understood the accident to the Breton *bénitier*. Trix had meant it to drop. Kate would not mind; she would be glad if the child had turned from all that nonsense, but there was, in the action, something acutely painful to her. Yet how were they to live together if she allowed herself to become sensitive, perhaps imaginative? No, Kate now would turn bravely to their future in their new home and face it firmly. This transition state must be got over quickly. She determined that she would push on much faster with reducing the house to a habitable state. Anything was better than these dreary days spent in waiting about for men who came late or in unpacking those terribly familiar things that had belonged to her father or had been picked up by herself and Horace. The Conistons were famous for their knowledge of china, furniture, brass—all the things about which most of us blunder in our buying, were obviously right or wrong to St. John Coniston and his daughters. Horace had been an apt and admiring pupil. Once or twice Kate had almost told Trix where and how they had bought many of these things that were associated in her mind with some of the happiest moments in her life, but she had checked herself. Like all good judges of what is beautiful she suffered from what was ugly, and she also hated disorder and dirt and confusion. So she determined to work harder and hurry things up. Once they were

in the house she could see something of the people she wanted Trix to know. At the club already quite a number of last season's acquaintances had welcomed her warmly. But she wanted to get into a house of her own where she could see whom she liked and not be disturbed by some of the loquacious ladies who were tiresome at the club. Trix had been quite ready to talk with these acquaintances of her mother's and had not been as fastidious as Kate had expected her to be.

As they went back in a taxi after despairing of the man from Maple's, Trix said:

"If you don't want me to-morrow evening I should like to go to the Woman's Suffrage meeting they were talking of last night."

Kate was relieved to hear any proposition as to her own wishes from Trix, and cordially agreed that she should go under the wing of two Miss Cunninghams who haunted the club and who were ardent supporters of the movement.

II

THE EVIL THAT MEN DO LIVES AFTER THEM

IT seemed to Stephen as he waited in Mrs. Blake's drawing-room on a cold winter's morning that he had never liked a room better. It gave a sense of space: the colouring was that of a shelf of well-bound books.

He had seen Mrs. Blake several times at her club while she was getting into the house, but he had not seen Trix and he had heard nothing of her beyond the slightest allusions from her mother.

Kate came in from the back part of the room. It struck him as a surprise that the hair which made a full frame to her forehead was so white. The grasp of her hand was very friendly.

"It is admirable," she said, as they sat down on opposite sides of the fireplace. Stephen flushed with pleasure. "The year in Switzerland is astonishingly well done; it quite surprised me." She paused. "As to the earlier part, I never saw my mother-in-law, but I should think you had understood her wonderfully. We were married in the spring; we put off going to Cornwall till the winter and she died rather suddenly. Horace arrived just too late. Then Mary Blake came to stay with us. I don't think you have given quite a living impression of her. She was very like Trix; I see the likeness constantly. The Celtic strain was strong in Mary. If only she had been brought up under different influences earlier in her life she might

have been a very remarkable woman. She gave herself whole-heartedly to the ideal that had been put before her. She became a nun, and she died quite young. Horace always said that it was the life that killed her." Mrs. Blake's voice quivered. "Her going had a terrible effect on Horace; it raised the wildest element in him. It was as if some part of his nature had been brutally rent away. They made her think that she could still be intimate with her brother and have much influence over him. But he warned her that he would never see her again and he never did."

This was deeply interesting to Stephen, but Trix had been alluded to and he was anxious to bring her back to Mrs. Blake's mind.

"When Mary was dying," Kate continued, "she wrote to me and asked me to persuade Horace to go and see her. I did try"—this a little defiantly—"it was of no use. He was hard as iron about her by then."

"Was she like Miss Trix in the face?" ventured Stephen.

"Very, only her eyes were lighter. There is some blue in Trix's eyes underneath the brown. Mary's were clear blue."

"What does—" he hesitated. "What does Miss Blake think of these chapters?"

Mrs. Blake turned slowly away from the fire.

"She has not seen them," she said; "no one has seen them but myself."

There was a silence that Stephen began to find embarrassing. It was broken by Mrs. Blake.

"I think you will find interesting," she said, "an article I turned up the other day. I never knew who

wrote it. 'Ibsen and Blake' was the title, and it went to disprove the absurd popular idea of Ibsen's influence on my husband."

Just then the door opened and Trix came in. Stephen started as if it had been matter for surprise to see her in her mother's house. She was dressed in grey with white fur and a black hat. He was not quite sure that he liked her to look so fashionable, though there was a certain reserve even in that. Trix had known he was there; she greeted him as a friend, but perhaps a not very intimate one. He would have given a good deal to be at his ease. Trix turned at once to Mrs. Blake and spoke quickly.

"I am going to walk to the Cunninghams and they will take me on to the meeting with them."

"Very well, I will join you there."

"You will take a taxi, mother? It is so cold, and you were coughing this morning."

"I don't think it will hurt me to go by the Tube."

Trix urged the taxi again and appealed to Stephen to confirm her view of the weather. At last Kate promised and a moment later Trix had gone, saying that she must not be late as her friends were lunching early for her sake.

As Trix left the room Stephen felt Kate's eyes fixed upon himself. He turned over the papers he held in his hands. He marvelled at the change in Trix; the rather self-confident manner, the touch of the woman of the world, the solicitude for her mother. He had not looked her full in the face, he had not found it possible. But he had known that there was no sense of special comradeship between Trix and himself, while there was a sense of close intimacy between Trix and her mother. There had been something

intense in her voice as she pressed Mrs. Blake as to the taxi. On one point he had been obviously mistaken. However Mrs. Blake had persuaded Trix to give up all share in the biography, it had not been done with any cruelty or unkindness.

Now she had gone and Stephen was most painfully preoccupied with the thought of her; it was not possible for him to pretend that he wanted Kate to go on discussing the differences between Ibsen and Horace Blake.

"I think she is looking well," said Kate.

"Very," said Stephen. He got up. "I think I too must be off," he said.

Kate rose. She looked as if she wanted to say more and her lips opened, but if she had had the intention of disburthening herself of the thought that seemed to oppress her, she changed her mind and merely said: "Good-bye."

She shook hands warmly, but said nothing about his coming again. He was sure that this was not an intentional lapse; he knew that she wanted to speak further of Trix, but that she could not.

He went away feeling horribly depressed, and then told himself he was absurdly fanciful. He was lunching with a friend who had made him promise to go with her to a Woman's Suffrage meeting that afternoon. His friend, Mrs. John Darcy, was not a suffragette as yet; she was on the brink, which made her mental condition interesting to those who wanted to encourage her to take the plunge. It was not until they had actually reached the small hall in Kensington where the meeting was to be held that the question of the suffrage was mentioned between them. Mrs. Darcy had always been a confirmed play-goer and

had been delighting in recollections of Blake's plays, and Stephen would much rather her shrewd comments had not been interrupted by their arrival at their destination. The meeting had begun and Mrs. Darcy took the nearest empty seats to the door. There had been a burst of applause during the moment while they were getting into their places. With an absurd feeling, that is not uncommon, that his entrance would interrupt the speaker less if he did not look up, Stephen kept his eyes lowered. The applause died down and a woman's clear voice penetrated through the hall. Stephen started. The speaker was Trix Blake.

Standing with the fingers of one hand lightly touching the table, bending forward a little, her eyes fixed on some point behind them in the hall, Trix was soon exciting another round of applause. There was pain in the voice, and at the first moment the pathos of her young face was intolerable to him; presently the sharp note of revolt hurt him in a different way. This was what she was saying:

"Men have ranked it as the highest virtue in women to forgive the offences they have committed against them. But they have been proud of the men who could not forgive unfaithfulness in woman. Men have taught women to believe that wives should kneel in thankfulness before the men who are faithful to them, but what man feels any gratitude to the woman who has been faithful to him?

"Women have acted up to the code that has been taught them. They, by reason of their ignorance, were powerless in the hands of men, and they often loved their masters, sometimes from an instinct of self-defence, sometimes because men had not abused

all the power in their hands. That is the love of a bondwoman. Man had not learnt, has not yet learnt, what is the love of a freed-woman."

Rounds and rounds of applause. Stephen felt petrified. Mrs. Darcy turned to him with a smile.

"My poor dear John!" she said.

Then he saw that Mrs. Blake was sitting not far from them; her face was white and set. She leant forward once, as if moved by some sudden thought, and then sat as upright as before.

Trix went on flowingly much on the same lines. It was reminiscent of Stuart Mill for a time, then she launched into figures as to the comparative wages of men and women, after which she denounced the factory laws made nominally for the protection of women, but in reality framed to handicap them in their competition with men. She might be superficial, but she was wonderfully lucid, and at moments picturesque, as in giving a recent instance of a man's cruelty to his wife. But through it all Stephen felt with horrible clearness the drama of Trix's own soul.

From the child as he had first seen her not a year ago, bending over Horace Blake as he lay on the invalid chair, to this strange, weird little orator with her shining eyes, what a change!

All round him he heard murmurs of applause.

"Is n't she magnificent?"

"She is the best we have had for ever so long."

"Yes; she is Horace Blake's daughter; she gets her genius from him."

"She must have learnt a great deal from him."

Stephen repeated the words to himself.

"Learnt a great deal from him!" Yes, that was true. She had learnt from knowing him the expe-

rience of an ideal ending in disillusion; she had had her faith wrecked and her hopes crushed. He did not know what Mrs. Blake and Anne had done to her, but he knew that they had killed the Trix with whom he had watched great sunsets and talked of Horace Blake.

"'The evil that men do lives after them,'" he thought. Nothing to him could illustrate the child's theme of woman's suffering better than herself. The matter of her speech had been read up in handbooks; there was little that was original; it was like the matter prepared for election speeches in its tricky superficiality, but the soul of the speech was the agony that had passed over Trix's head and under which she was still submerged.

"Can no one save our girls from this sort of thing?" asked Mrs. Darcy as Trix, colouring deeply, alluded in veiled language to the horrors of the London streets. "She won't blush when she has done it half a dozen times."

At last Trix came to her conclusion.

"We have behind us," she said, "centuries of darkness, of oppression, the cries of the bought slave, the imprisoned wife, the deserted mother, the low moan of those who have given love and forgiveness and life itself to those who did not value their gifts. All these sounds—and there are notes of awful torture among them—ring in our ears, but we must not let them overwhelm us. We have to look forward, we must not despair of humanity. Women are awake to-day as they have never been awake before. There is a solidarity amongst them unknown in the past, and that presages great things in the future. History will have much to tell of the women of to-day. It will be

no small thing if it can tell of us that we went forward, pitiful but undismayed, making any sacrifice that we were called upon to make, to set free the souls and bodies of half the human race."

She sat down amidst as much applause as the crowd of women and the handful of men scattered among them could produce.

Then she rose again, and her voice sounded weak and exhausted. "I forgot to move the resolution." She then moved the resolution that the meeting approved of the grant of the parliamentary franchise to women. It was the first time she had made any mention of the franchise.

Stephen, hastily explaining his object to Mrs. Darcy, rose and made his way to Mrs. Blake.

"How wonderfully well she spoke!"

Mrs. Blake raised her tired eyes to his.

"I dislike it so intensely that I don't suppose I can judge of it fairly."

Stephen took the empty chair next to her while a gloomy-looking young man began his speech. Kate went on speaking as if words were a relief.

"It is even worse than I thought it would be," she said. "I refused to come before. Burke said you could not bring an indictment against a whole nation; it 's more preposterous to bring it against a whole sex. Then it is such a grotesque account of the relations of men and women. They make a child like Trix put all the blame of the suffering of one-half of humanity on the shoulders of the other. Have not men done as much to relieve the sufferings of women as women have done to relieve the sufferings of men?"

"I can't talk about it at all," said Stephen. "It seems to me that to attempt to judge human nature

like that you must be superhuman. I 'm not up to the job. But Heaven knows what the House of Commons can do to put the world to rights!"

His eyes were fixed on Trix, who drooped on her chair.

"It must tire her very much."

"Yes, but it is an enormous interest. I let it begin because I thought the interest good for her. Of course, 'a cause' is a delightful thing in life, but now . . ."

They felt that they had spoken as much as they ought, while the poor young man was trying to bring Trix's flights to bear on the question of the vote for women. Stephen went back to Mrs. Darcy as soon as the speech was finished.

"Well, I am an anti-suffragette at this moment," she said, "and shall probably remain so until I go to an anti-suffragette meeting, when someone will talk against women's brains, which is a thing I can't stand. We are too clever by half; only education is making some of us stupid, and the stupidest thing women can do is to tell men that they are slaves. I only hope men won't take advantage of it."

Stephen hardly listened to anything she said, and he was profoundly uninterested in the taking of the vote which followed; he was too anxious to get Mrs. Darcy into a taxi and off his hands, so that he might come back and see Trix if only for a moment. Mrs. Darcy only realised that he was not coming with her as he shut the door of the taxi, and she nodded a hasty "good-bye."

Stephen flew up the steps back to the hall, which was already beginning to empty. He saw Trix at once. She was standing near the door selling literature with the cordial exalted manner of a religious missionary.

"Yes," he heard her say, "*Woman a Few Shrieks*, is a shilling; *The Human Woman* is more expensive."

Stephen came close to her, but she did not see him. Two or three girls were talking to her all together.

"You were too wonderful, Trix."

"Let me sell the literature, darling; you must get your tea."

"She must get some tea at once; she looks so white."

"I 'll come in a moment," said Trix kindly, with a faint touch of patronage. Then she saw Stephen. She turned to him with just the same tired, cordial manner. "Can I sell you any of these, Mr. Tempest?" and then, after a moment's hesitation, in the cheerful, kindly tone of the canvasser, "I hope you are quite sound?"

"Sound on the vote?" asked Stephen, while his eyes sought hers, almost threatening in his anxiety. "Oh, no, I 'm not!"

"Then you must be converted," said Trix, and the admiring group murmured assent. Suddenly her look changed, and there was a moment of undisguised human feeling between them.

Terrible suffering spoke out of Trix's glance, and an appeal for sympathy that wrung his heart.

Then she gave a little laugh and looked round.

"I am too tired to convert anybody now," she said. "Who spoke of tea?"

She bowed to Stephen as she handed the literature to a girl near her, and he knew that he was dismissed. A few moments later from the other side of the street he saw a group of girls turn into a tea-shop. It was Trix and her devoted followers.

III

NANCY POTTER'S PICTURE

MRS. GEORGE SHENSTONE was saying "good-night" to her dinner-party. The dinner-party had sat down thirteen souls in all, and Trix Blake was the missing fourteenth. Trix, who had lived in a whirl of meetings for three weeks since the day on which Stephen had heard her speak, was taking the chair at a debate, regardless of her engagement to dine out.

Mrs. Shenstone knew that to be a suffragette was demoralising, but she had hardly expected that demoralisation to stretch so far as to make a girl to whom she had been particularly kind throw out her table at the last moment, and this because she had been asked to chair a debate at an hour's notice. Dinner-parties are the foundation of society, and are, of course, sacred in all sets; but they were far the most serious work Mrs. Shenstone had in life as a wife and as a woman.

George Shenstone was very angry—he had often said that she ought never to ask less than sixteen people for fear of such an accident—so angry that their usual *rôles* were reversed, and she was really afraid of being alone with him.

"Do stay and have a talk," she said in her low, metallic voice, as Stephen Tempest made his way towards her to say "good-night," and Stephen, without hesitation, stayed. It had been a fearfully dreary

dinner for him. He rather liked good things to eat and drink, and the Shenstones' edible and drinkable things were superb. But they were some of the same people, and all of the same set, as the house-party in the Highlands—men who could talk of a "twang" in port and women who could discourse of their tailors, directly in face of the sunset over the loch. Their gross materialism stank in Stephen's nostrils to-night, as he told himself. George Shenstone was nearly as angry with him for his insufferable manners as he was with Trix for not coming. It was natural that Tempest should be annoyed at Trix not turning up, but that was no reason for giving himself such airs; and Shenstone knew the difference between mere disappointment and bad temper.

It seemed to Stephen that he was at the end of his tether when he got upstairs, and that he should break loose in some way and do something odd. Bridge was a relief; they played till midnight, and therefore it was very late when Mrs. Shenstone and Stephen sat down alone. George Shenstone was sulking in the smoking-room downstairs. It was some comfort to him that Tempest had lost money.

Mrs. Shenstone drew her turquoise velvet skirt to one side, and put her elaborate blue-and-gold shoes on the fender. Stephen wondered as usual as she bent her head who was her wig maker, and what his age must be by now.

He was not surprised by her first question.

"Have you seen Trix lately?" she asked.

"I heard her speak at a meeting."

"Detestable nonsense! I can't think what Kate Blake is about."

"Her mother hates it," said Stephen.



Mrs. Shenstone pressed the coils of a great diamond serpent that crawled over the region of her heart.

"Well, I suppose she has lost all control over Trix. I was never so disappointed in a girl in my life; it must be Horace Blake coming out in her. Probably she won't marry. What man in his senses would marry a girl who talks indecencies in public?"

"She does not talk indecencies," said Stephen hotly.

"Well, you may not call them indecencies. I do, and so did my mother before me. How long ago is it since you heard her speak?"

"Nearly three weeks."

"And you have not seen her since then?"

"Yes; I have seen her just four times, but never for more than a moment—twice at her mother's house, and twice we have met (but each time in a crowd) at a party."

"Trix has been avoiding you. I thought so from the way she answered me when I asked her when she had seen you. She said you were both too busy to see much of each other. That was obviously absurd." Then, after the briefest pause, Mrs. Shenstone said abruptly:

"I have been wanting to talk to you. I must know about Horace Blake's Life." Her tone was imperious.

Stephen stared at her.

"Why are you anxious about it?"

She looked round at him with her shallow grey-blue eyes. She was evidently capable of being more natural, but also harder than he had thought.

"I must know what will come out about Nancy Potter."

"Nancy Potter?" echoed Stephen blankly. Some-

body else—was it Hales, by the bye?—had asked him what he knew about Nancy Potter.

"Nancy Potter," Mrs. Shenstone went on, "was my stepfather's daughter, and therefore"—her tone was emphatic—"no relation of mine. At the same time, I do think I ought to be told what will come out about her in Horace Blake's Life."

Mrs. Shenstone got up from the low chair, shook her train a little carefully, and with a dramatic movement seated herself opposite Stephen.

"It is right that you should know the truth about Horace Blake," she said.

Was it possible, he wondered, that there was anything he did not know already about Blake? why he walked about weighted with Blake's iniquities.

"I know that Nancy Potter acted in his plays."

"She was a great actress, but she was only great because Horace Blake developed her. He made her great. She was an intense Methodist, gentle, quiet—goody-goody, we thought her. I don't think he was in love with her, but he made her act in his plays, and then he set to work to see if she would keep good or not. He threw her with men who charmed other women, and when that failed, he tried himself. He wanted a demure Puritan for a play; a Puritan who would fall in the end. He wrote parts at first for her as the unfallen Puritan." Mrs. Shenstone's eyes glittered as she looked at him. "At last he succeeded, and she fell, and then he wrote a play about the fallen Puritan, and he made her act that play too. She did it for three months, and then she went away. She went to New York and acted there for three weeks, and then she went farther away, and the oddest part of the story was that Kate Blake went to New York



with her and out West with her, and was with her when she died. Kate Blake is the greatest woman I have ever known. I saw Nancy—Nancy Potter was her professional name, but I would rather only call her that—I saw Nancy before she went away, and felt sure that she would die unless Kate Blake should prove to be too much for her, and should make her live."

"What year was it that she died?"

"Eighteen years ago. Nobody remembers her now, and Kate saved her good name. It must be kept safe now."

"That is why Mrs. Blake has told me nothing of the hideous story. There are letters about Mrs. Blake going to America, and Trix being born out West. Mrs. Blake was very brave."

He was staring into the fire, and Mrs. Shenstone's hard eyes were gleaming with excitement, and she loved excitement.

"I have a miniature of Nancy Potter. I keep it locked up. I will show it to you."

Before the faded, rather poor miniature was put into his hand Stephen understood. He understood before Mrs. Shenstone had unlocked her bureau. As she passed him to go into the back drawing-room, his present surroundings became dim to him, and he was again with the father and daughter standing on white sand and looking out to sea. Trix had her arm through her father's; she was looking at him with worshipping, protecting love, and his whole face was full of light as he made some little joke to her. Even when Mrs. Shenstone's stiff figure in light blue velvet, with all the trappings that by no means concealed the hard nature of the woman beneath them, stood

close to him holding out the miniature, he hardly saw her.

He only saw Horace and Trix; and at first he could not judge of the miniature. It simply seemed to him to be the wretched copy of a poor photograph with no sort of individuality. Mrs. Shenstone had sat down and fixed her eyes steadily on him. He caught their look and tried to steady his attention. He could not refuse to see the likeness. Trix was much more like Mary Blake and Horace than she was like the Methodist Nancy Potter. And yet there was a likeness—the shape of the head, the way it was set on the neck, the sloping shoulders. Eighteen years ago this woman had died out West, and eighteen years ago Trix had been born out West, and Kate Blake had brought home the baby who grew up with not the faintest resemblance to herself. Of two things he felt convinced at once—that Kate had never betrayed her own secret to Trix, and yet that Trix had found it out. He hardly knew how the next moments passed or how he said "good-night" to Mrs. Shenstone. He walked away from the house looking dazed as the clock struck one from a neighbouring church.

The thought of Trix's suffering filled his mind, the awful irony of the fact that had been known to Horace Blake and not to her while she was loving and tending her father at the end. She was only eighteen, and she had developed so rapidly; the child he had seen first could not have written that wonderful paper which she had written only a few months later. And now this dreadful parody of heroism in a great cause; this horrid, unnatural strength of revolt, was the fever that had followed the shock of that hideous revelation. The only comfort in it all was her new

devotion to the woman whom she now knew was not her mother. Stephen glowed with admiration of those two, but he hated Blake as he had never hated him before. He could not go to bed, and he sat with a cigarette that he forgot to light for nearly half an hour contemplating the red embers of his dying fire.

Even the most vivid letters that showed the vile passages strewn through the years of Horace's life did not affect Stephen with as much horror as did this one sin that had borne such terrible fruit. How on earth had Mrs. Blake and Trix lived through these months at all? No doubt Mrs. Blake had been right in thinking it a good thing for Trix to have a cause. He loved Trix's courage, loved the way in which she had carried her head bravely, and not bowed it in any false shame. It was a difficult task he had before him, but he was certain now that if he were too poor to be a good match, it would yet be no selfish thing to marry her. How could they be safe as to this secret? And what would be the consequences to Trix if it got known, and she saw that it was known? He felt that there was such a tension about Trix now that anything might prove the one unendurable last touch. He wished she had become a Roman Catholic—any influence would be safer than to be absolutely rudderless, driven into any current by the passion of revolt against the fact of her own existence. He felt as one might feel towards a sick child in the street—simply longing to get it into warmth and shelter, and give it the chance of healing. But what if this child would choose rather to be out alone, ill and cold, than to come into the loving shelter prepared for her?

IV

NO; IT'S NO USE

TRIX was tired, but excited. She welcomed the quiver of her nerves, the tingle of excitement that followed a successful speech. Then she had dared much the night before in throwing over the Shenstones' dinner for the cause, and she had succeeded in avoiding Stephen Tempest. Mrs. Blake had been away; she had gone down for a night to see Anne Coniston, who was going to spend the rest of the winter abroad. The sun was full on her mother's sitting-room, and Trix, having gone there to find the morning papers, sat down in the sunshine to read them by her mother's fire. She hardly ever sat still now for more than a few moments. There was always some little thing or other to do connected with the "cause." What she did not realise, and what disturbed Kate who did realise it, was that when there really was nothing to do, Trix moved incessantly from one chair to another, or sat suddenly on the rug, and then lay on the sofa, and a second later would be bolt upright on a little stool. She had a cigarette constantly in her hand, and held it in curiously the same way her father had held his. This morning she read the suffrage news eagerly, and then gathered up her letters that had fallen on the ground when she sat down. She heard the door open behind her. Instead of the servant she expected to see, Stephen Tempest came in. Her face for a moment showed that she was

surprised and annoyed; she made no sign. Stephen crossed to the hearth-rug in a stride, and looked tall and stiff as he stood there.

"Mrs. Blake told me to come and fetch some diaries she keeps here if I wanted them."

Trix jumped up, and in her new company manner said that she was just off and would not disturb him.

"I wish you would not try to be civil," said Stephen, with a faint attempt at humour, looking sadly at the rug on which he stood.

"Was I civil?" asked Trix lightly. "I apologise."

"I think that is the most trying part of the treatment," he said, trying to keep to the same tone. "Whatever I deserve," he looked up at the big window to his left, "I think I might be spared that."

There was a certain strength in his attitude as he stood there.

"What nonsense!" said Trix.

"Exactly," said Stephen; "I do think it is nonsense."

"What are you talking about?"

"By 'it,' I referred to the civility with which you treat me. We might have been introduced to each other a few days ago."

"It is only that I am busy and you are busy, and——"

"Civility does not really save time, you see," said Stephen; "because the people whom we used to treat as friends demand explanations, and that takes up time."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do."

Stephen's voice was now simply weary and sad. Trix noticed it, but hardened herself. Still she evi-

dently could not get away. She took up her letters from the table on which she had put them a few minutes ago, and holding them in her hand as a protest, sat down on a low chair by the bureau.

"What is it? Why do you avoid me as you do? and when you fail to escape you are—well, I won't call it anything but civil. But I am sure I enjoy our meetings no more than you do, and it is a pity—if I am right and we were really friends so short a time ago, in—in the Highlands."

"That was years ago," said Trix.

And he felt as if the mask had fallen for a moment, but he dared not look at her.

"Trix," he said suddenly, "has this suffrage business so entered into your soul, into the marrow of your bones, that you have no pity?" He tried to speak lightly again now. "No mercy on a mere man."

"I don't see that men have much to be pitied for; they can do what they like."

"How strange that must sound to the Eternal Powers," he said sadly.

"Are there any Eternal Powers?" asked Trix.

"I thought so," said Stephen. "Well, then, you think that we are all-powerful and have made the bad world what it is. Men are evil gods. But now take me as a concrete instance if you can condescend to do so; am I powerful? Have I done much to make this poor world go wrong? Am I an evil god? Am I happy? You know I am not happy!"

"I did not mean you," said Trix, "of course."

"No; this specimen does not suit the theory. I am not happy. I don't believe you are happy, and you won't make yourself any happier by being unkind to me. But don't try to deceive yourself, Trix. You



know perfectly well why I am unhappy, and if you choose to ignore me the thought of me will haunt you. You can't help that—that much of evil eye I do possess —you won't be able to hurt me without my hurting you. I repeat it because I want you to understand it."

He still looked at the window, and he spoke low and with all the sadness that last night had brought on him.

"While you are speaking of the abstract, all-powerful man who has held throughout the ages the abstract, delicate, pure woman in his horrid grasp, you won't be able to forget that there is a poor sort of man who suffers too, though you won't understand why, or how much, from being in your grasp. The audience will applaud, but you will be haunted."

Trix did not look up. He had gained in force from the fact that he had calculated every word, so as to keep them both off the edges of the precipice, and there were many ways to the edge of it that might have proved fatal. He thought he had kept safely away from the faintest betrayal of the pity that he was fighting down as he saw her pick a little with white shaking fingers at her skirt. He must wake no reminiscence of her father. He only wanted to give her and himself the chance of breaking their bonds, and being to each other what he believed they were meant to be. He turned aside, knelt down by the book-case, and took out of the shelf the two volumes he wanted. Then he stood for a moment with them in his hand.

"It 's no use to go on talking, is it, Trix?"

There was a yearning inquiry in his tone now. She did not answer.

"Is it of any use?"

Trix was staring at the ground at her feet. She raised her eyes and saw above Stephen's head the face of Horace Blake in Surot's picture.

"No; it 's no use." Her eyes were cold and bright, and her voice hard.

"I think it was right to do it now," said Stephen to himself, as he walked down Eccleston Square; "but it was a little hard on me. Poor darling! May the God she has rejected bless her; no one else can do any good."

V

I LIVE NOW FOR THE CAUSE OF WOMEN

AT past twelve o'clock that night Trix, who had slept for half an hour, woke up with dry, burning eyes and looked about her. The fire was giving out one bright little flame, and by it Kate was sitting leaning back in a low chair wrapped in her long purple dressing-gown. Trix watched her for some moments in silence. The firelight made her features more marked, almost harsh.

"Mother, you ought to be in bed."

"Ought I?" Mrs. Blake turned round with a sweet smile.

Trix sat up.

"I think Stephen Tempest wants me to marry him."

"I am very thankful," said Kate earnestly.

"But I can't."

"I hoped you were crying about that when I got home to-night," said Kate. The room was large and square. Trix's bed was in the corner furthest from the fireplace. She bent forward as if she thought Kate had not heard her.

"I would marry him to-morrow if I were not what I am."

"But do you suppose for a moment that caring for you as he does——"

"It 's of no use. It would be a sacrifice, and I won't accept sacrifices. As it is, he need never know the truth."

This was the moment Kate had been looking forward to with longing and with dread ever since Trix had come to the knowledge of the truth.

Trix had drawn up her knees and her head was bent low. From where Kate sat she looked like a child in anguish. Kate almost prayed to say the right thing now.

"I should feel if you married Stephen Tempest that I had fulfilled the task I undertook when your mother was dying."

"And how about *his* mother and his children?" demanded Trix, looking up.

"Then after all I shall have failed," murmured the woman sitting by the fire.

"I read the letters you gave me," Trix went on in a high voice, "that told me about my mother; how she fell once, how she had been in many temptations before that she had resisted. It is not my mother that I should be afraid to see again in my children," in a lower voice, "it is my father."

Kate flushed painfully; she felt as if Trix might have spared her this insult.

"It is of no use," she went on, "to tell me of how good a stock he came, and that I am far more like Mary than I am like him. I am determined that he shall leave no human trace of himself on the earth. I would have killed myself only I was too cowardly, and now I have something to live for. I live now for the cause of women against such men as he."

Kate's anguish was too deep for her sympathy to be easily dried up, but there was to her, with the richness of a strong woman's nature, something repulsive in the child's hardness. She did not recognise that it was the same spirit of revolt that she had seen so often

in her father. Trix was more like Horace Blake when she spoke out at last in her revulsion against him than she had ever been before.

"I can't listen to you while you speak of your father like that"—very slowly. "If you knew one fraction of the longing I have to be with him again, to have again our fight in life together, his companionship, his love—I would have it all back, all I have suffered, if I could just be with him again." The voice was lower; the words came slowly and distinctly. "A child like you cannot judge of a great man like him. Nature built him on strange lines; he had strange temptations. He was not like other men; but even if he had not cared for me to the end, and I know he did care for me to the end, it would have been worth while to live on the memory of his courtship. You don't understand, even Stephen Tempest could never understand. Do you think there was anything I would not have given up for him—yes, honour, truth, anything? And he for me? It was for me he gave up his religion, his dream of another world, his love of his mother and his sister; there was no barrier our love would not have broken down. And he came to me when he died; it was the last flicker of his life. I knew he was with me, speaking to me, making all plain. I made Dr. Saumur look at his watch, and I knew afterwards that it was at that moment he died."

She stopped speaking and rose. As she left the room, she paused almost at the foot of the bed.

Trix's chin looked sharp just above her knees. The eyes were enormous in the obscurity, the lips were tightly closed, the hands were clasped round her knees.

As she turned away Kate suddenly saw a most strong likeness to Horace. She stood for a moment on the landing to steady herself; then she listened. There was no sound at all, not one more sob from Trix.

Had she failed at the very moment of crisis? But what could she do? How could she sympathise with the child and be loyal to the father? It was Horace that stood between them, and although she could not formulate anything so obvious in words, her whole nature put Horace supremely first.

VI

KATE MADE A SPLENDID MISTAKE

MRS. SHENSTONE was standing in Kate's sitting-room, a sable cloak falling from her sloping shoulders, holding a tortoise-shell lorgnette to her eyes, looking with cool Philistine criticism at Surot's picture. Her mouth was fixed in a straight line, indicating a dislike that was not emotional.

Kate gave a slight shudder as she saw the attitude of her visitor. They greeted with the familiarity of Christian names.

"Come and see my drawing-room, Clara," said Kate quietly. The habit of putting up with Clara Shenstone was one of many years' standing and required no great effort, only it would not have been possible in the presence of Surot's picture.

"How is Trix?" demanded Mrs. Shenstone as they went into the drawing-room.

"She is in bed."

"Is she ill?"

"I don't think so, but she has just stayed in bed for a week."

"What 's that for?" demanded Mrs. Shenstone.

"I don't know. For the first two days I was very glad, but——"

"I don't imagine you want her to become quite bedridden," said Clara Shenstone.

"No, I suppose she will get up some day." Kate gave a wan smile. "She never explained a word about

it; she never said that she was going to stay in bed; she only ordered her meals as if it were an acknowledged fact that she must have her food up-stairs. She has seen nobody, and I have not asked what the servants are saying when people come to see her. I suppose they simply say 'Not at home.' "

"When did she take to her bed?"

"You remember the night when she ought to have dined with you? I was away or I might have prevented her treating you so badly. Well, she got up the following morning, but she has not got up again since. She is quite peaceful and charming when I go to see her, only she has now got into her head that I ought to go to bed too; she is most solicitous for me."

"Kate, we have both held that child in long clothes, and it 's no use keeping on the outside of things. When did she find out?"

Kate turned a troubled face away. Clara Shenstone had very little veneration in her nature, but she always kept some of that small stock reserved for Kate Blake.

"I see," she said; "you don't want to answer. Never mind. I know that she knows. I heard her make a speech, and I saw at once that she had found out—and then, the devotion to you came on so suddenly."

Kate was still silent.

"Never mind," Mrs. Shenstone went on. "But this suffrage thing is a mistake."

"Yes, it is," said Kate sadly.

"It is a mistake because it makes her prominent, and her bitterness is such—" She hesitated. "You know what I mean. It made me wonder, it may make——"



"But then you knew, and no one else knows."

"I have never felt so very sure," said Mrs. Shenstone slowly. "I have never felt it, the secret, to be really safe. But it 's no use speculating. Trix should marry Stephen Tempest."

"Oh! how I wish she would.'

"Then," Mrs. Shenstone's eyes glittered, "he has proposed to her? Oh, well, I see you don't want to speak of that; don't—only—" She stopped a moment. "What is the use of her staying in bed?"

"I think it 's something in her that is very tired."

"Well, good-bye, Kate, and think over what I have said."

She pecked at Kate's cheek and was out of the room in a moment, shut the door behind her and went quickly up-stairs. She tried the wrong door first, and then walked into Trix's room with half a knock.

"Well, my dear, how are you?"

Trix stared and looked very cross.

"I am all right," she answered shortly.

"Oh, no, you are not!" said Mrs. Shenstone. "Is one allowed to sit down?"

"Oh, please do."

The intruder carefully took off her sable coat and displayed an over-elaborate blue frock to Trix's critical view.

"I ought to be very angry with you; you were a naughty child. But I excused you because I knew that you threw me over in order to avoid meeting a certain young man."

Trix's cheeks became scarlet and her eyes grew large.

"My dear Trix, do you suppose that we were all blind in the Highlands?"

"I did n't think——"

"About us, I daresay not; but we uninteresting old people did think about you happy young ones. Why! George reproached me for letting you be so much together."

"Why?" gasped Trix.

"Because Stephen Tempest has no money to speak of, but I said the money not to speak of would be enough."

Trix was torn between anger and curiosity.

"Well then, Trix, you met in the train and had a pretty bad quarrel, and you gave yourself away completely to me by the look on your face. Since that you have been running away from him in the most marked manner. What was the use of that unless you wanted him to propose? As you have refused him——"

"I refused him!" cried Trix with a clumsy attempt at astonishment.

"Yes; was it before you left us to dine thirteen rather than meet him?"

"No"—quickly.

"It 's no use giving yourself airs to me, Trix. I held you in my arms when you wore long clothes, and Kate made a splendid mistake. She is too good for this world, and now this is the sort of gratitude you show her."

Trix was dead white now.

"I know it was hard on you after all those years, but it 's no use behaving as if it were such an unheard-of tragedy and breaking her heart over again. You are extraordinarily lucky in being legitimate in law. Kate tricked the law to save you and to save the woman who had wronged her. Your own mother was my stepfather's daughter. No one knows the truth



but me and one other person. And now, after eighteen years of Kate's long endurance this is how you treat her. The world need never know if you don't hug your trouble in a selfish way. For Heaven's sake have some sense and don't break her heart, and this poor man's heart, and cut your own throat!"

Trix was leaning forward in the bed, clenching her hands, trying not to break out with the feelings that seemed to herself to be nothing but wild rage.

"Who—?" she managed to say.

"Who else knows," answered Mrs. Shenstone coolly. "Stephen Tempest."

Trix gave a shriek.

"He knew it before he proposed to you, my dear little goose."

"Go away," cried Trix, "oh, go away! Why did you come here? Oh, do go away!"

"I am going now. I have no more to say. I 'm not the brute you think, though I have been brutal. Good-bye, Trix!"

VII

SHE WOULD TELL ME

KATE left the house without suspecting that Mrs. George Shenstone was still in it, and then walked quickly in the direction of St. George's Hospital. For a few minutes her mind continued to dwell on Trix. Clara Shenstone had been what she always was—extremely annoying. She had brought a cold draught of worldliness to blow on the difficulties Kate alone could deal with in regard to Trix. Kate's nerves did not tingle irritably, they had been too long under the control of a severe treatment to do that—but without any excitement she was greatly displeased. She wanted Trix to marry Stephen, but she very much disliked the idea that the thing ought to be done here and now for worldly motives. Clara, she thought, had not even faced the worst trouble—the fact that Stephen must be told the truth before the marriage was possible, and the other fact that Trix would rather never see him again than let him know it. She was inclined to think that Clara made too much of the effect of Trix's speeches. Surely, though the only one she had heard had been terrible to her, the child's heart-broken bitterness would not excite such comments as Mrs. Shenstone imagined. Clara knew the truth and understood; but would other people make anything of it? Of course, if the story of Nancy Potter were dug up and the truth were guessed at, then people would comment on Trix's attitude, but not otherwise.

She reached the Tube station, and was on her way to Leicester Square when her mind reverted to the business she had in hand. A young journalist a little way from her was meanwhile watching Mrs. Blake. He had once had a few words with her when he had been to interview Horace Blake the week before the great man left England for the last time. It was an interview that he afterwards knew had been one of the dramatist's opportunities for laughing at the world and at himself. Coming out from Horace's room excited by his charm and strange flow of talk, he had seen Mrs. Blake in a plain blouse and unfashionable skirt, and she had made him think of one of the great figures on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Now she wore a black coat that hung in simple heavy folds, and on her grey hair a bonnet, of which the long veil was thrown back on her shoulders.

"She has suffered much since then," he thought, but she had also suffered much before then, and perhaps he imagined some of the changes he thought he observed in her face. Impertinence is a journalistic virtue, and this young man had his full share of the soft brass that sticks at nothing. At Dover Street a woman sitting next Kate got out and the young journalist took her place.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Blake. I saw you in an hotel in Dover Street."

"Yes, I do," said Kate, coming to from her own thoughts with an immense effort, and looking at the untidy young man with kindly reminiscence of his enthusiasm. "Yes, I do; I gave you a photograph."

"It is my greatest treasure," he said, although Blake's photograph, be it said in his defence, was not really as dear to him as those of his father, his mother,

and his first and second loves. Kate felt warmed by the look in the eager eyes.

"But when is the last play coming out?" he plunged bravely.

"I am on my way to see the publishers about it now."

They had to talk loud in order to be heard above the rattling noises about them. Then there was the lull at Leicester Square Station, and Kate could add in a lower voice:

"You want to be able to announce it; you may say that it can be expected before long."

He nodded eagerly. "I should like to," he said, "but I am no longer a journalist. I am working for Brown, Puck and Co.; how I wish you would publish with them!"

There was no time to say more.

Kate changed her Tube and soon found herself standing underneath St. Paul's. She experienced a sudden acute sense of refreshment. An old man sat on a bench and some children played near with such a sense of leisure as made a strange commentary on the awful hurry of the city. They helped the impression of the great passive dome in their independence of time. She stood a moment in the sunshine, which was unusually warm for the time of year, and then refreshed, she moved on briskly to Paternoster Row.

Mrs. Horace Blake was known in the office, and was not kept waiting for more than the inevitable moments during which the head partner of the firm could be told of her coming.

They met as old acquaintances, and then he plunged into business.

"I have read it myself," he said, which Kate felt to



be an astonishing announcement. The grey-haired man of business, who had been publishing books for forty years, like other publishers, read very few books himself.

"The fact is," he went on, "that our reader was rather frightened by it."

Kate's lip curled a little with unspoken scorn.

He turned his revolving chair so as to be quite opposite to her. "You see, Mrs. Blake, all the other plays and books are going very well; the melancholy event of the spring has quickened the sale immensely, and what we fear is that the publication of this play would injure the sale of the rest of the plays, the early novels, and the biography."

"But why?"

Kate spoke impatiently.

"The public at present," he joined the tips of his ten fingers as if their contact were a help to him, "the public at present," he repeated, "have taken a view of him which this last play would make impossible. Popular speakers and writers quote such passages as express what they choose to believe that Mr. Blake thought and believed. This play," tapping the pile of typewritten pages lying before him, "would raise such opposition, such indignation that Blake's works and Blake's Life would be tabooed by the religious and the old-fashioned world. And that, from the point of view of the sale, is a very serious consideration."

"Then you don't want to publish it?" said Kate, and she moved a little as if she were going to get up.

"What I would advise," said the publisher slowly, "is to wait until the present excellent run of the other things falls right off. Then I think the excitement, even if there were something of a scandal, would do no

great harm. And, of course, there would be the kind of sale for the play itself that always follows a controversy."

"I see," said Kate, "that you don't want it. I cannot take your view. I do not mean to put off the publication of a masterpiece, and I don't want to delay it precisely because it is the most outspoken of all his work. Of course, a dramatist represents the feelings of very different people; he loses himself in making them come alive, and the public interpret thoughts to be his own which he has only supplied to suit the characters. The wonder to me of this last play is that it is himself speaking and yet it is dramatic."

"You are determined to publish this before the biography appears?" Shrewd eyes had seen that it was so before the measured voice had spoken.

"Certainly."

He knew Kate Blake well enough not to argue with her.

"Well," he said, "if you will make this mistake, we have warned you and we can do no more."

Kate rose.

"Wait one moment please, Mrs. Blake. If you are determined to publish this we would rather do it for you than that it should be published by anybody else. The mischief would be done just as much."

"But you are afraid of it?"

"Afraid of the effect on the present sales, certainly."

"I am sorry," said Kate, "but considering the view you take of it, I would rather give it to somebody who would understand it better."

Kate left the office with the MS. in her hand. She was very angry now.



"What a tradesman! What a low tradesman!" she exclaimed to herself. "What does he care for genius or morals or anything else but his wretched trade?"

She had been prepared to find that the man might be shocked, possibly even scrupulous as to what he ought to do about it, but impressed, excited, dazzled, by the genius of the thing. Not a word of appreciation, of admiration from the first person besides herself who had read it. She became more and more angry and contemptuous. She got home very late for luncheon, ate hardly anything, and, after resting for a few minutes in the drawing-room, was going upstairs to see Trix when that young woman walked into the room in a coat and skirt and hat as if she meant to go out. She held her head very high, and her cheeks were bright, but that tears were recent was unmistakable. She sat down some way from the fire and from the chair from which Kate had just risen.

"They let Mrs. Shenstone come up to my room," she said indignantly.

"Clara Shenstone went to your room!" cried Kate in astonishment.

"She hardly knocked," said Trix. "She forced herself in. I hate her." The tears were coming out now. Trix put her handkerchief to her eyes. "What business was it of hers to come and tell me things? I hate her."

Kate was standing over her now.

"I hate her because—" Tears choked her for a moment.

"Because of what, Trix?"

"Because she would tell me, and it was no business of hers; she would tell me—" Suddenly Trix looked

straight up at Kate. "She told me the truth, that I am horrid, horrid to you, making everything worse for you."

"My dear child!"

"I 've been a selfish pig," Trix went on, "making it all harder for you. I 've been doing the heroine and making a fuss of myself and behaving horribly to you and to—to Stephen."

Kate still stood over her, waiting with intense anxiety for each word. Low and mumbled into the damp handkerchief came the next ones.

"Stephen knew—he knew—about my mother—before he—" Then she could get no farther. An enormous relief changed the whole expression of Kate's face.

A moment later Trix looked up shyly.

"Mother, you *do* like him?" she said earnestly. "I should not be happy unless I knew that."

It was not true, and Kate knew it was not true; but Trix thought it was true, and Kate knew that and therefore liked it.

VIII

THERE IS ONLY ONE REAL FACT

NEXT morning Kate received a letter from Stephen Tempest. He wrote from Paris, and he told her that he was going to stay abroad for a couple of months, during which time he would get on with the Life. He had arranged enough material to be able to write several chapters—he hoped so, at least—without having to return home to consult the papers he had left behind him. The letter was rather a shock to Kate. This sudden departure was not what she or Mrs. Shenstone had intended! Kate gave Trix the note to read and wondered if she were at all troubled by it. Certainly she concealed the trouble well, if there were any to conceal.

Trix continued to be very quiet, but Kate felt that the bustle and restlessness which had so suddenly stopped might revive again at any moment. She asked no questions, and could only suppose that Trix must have given her work for "the cause" into other hands. When she could not be of any use to Kate, Trix went for little walks and drives by herself, and smiled at her if they met on the stairs. During meals and at all times when they were together, Trix was inclined to be silent. It was a curious stillness, a little mysterious to the older woman who looked on.

It is true that love usually makes for anxiety, for doubts; but there are natures, Kate said to herself, who take it, once they have believed in its existence,

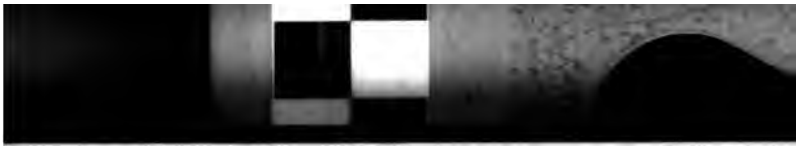
as if it were naturally lasting. Trix had come into a new world, and she did not appear to be curious or uneasy or anxious. Did it never occur to her to be anxious as Kate was anxious? Did it never even occur to her that Stephen, having had his dismissal, might take it as final?

It was Kate who had the morbid thought that Stephen had acted out of chivalrous pity, and even now might be thankful that he had not been taken at his word. Kate had no great opinion of the fidelity of men, and she was frightened at Trix's childlike confidence. "It is almost as if she had made up her mind to two months' sleep with full security as to who should wake her," said Kate to herself.

Meanwhile Kate was fully occupied. Two days after the interview with the publisher of most of Blake's works, his widow received a startlingly large offer from another firm—Brown, Puck & Co.—who were anxious to secure the play and did not ask to read it first. She would not let them sign the agreement until they had read it. Apparently nothing but admiration was expressed by whoever read it for the firm, and before long Kate received the first batch of proofs.

Then, while Trix took the dogs out for exercise, and arranged the flowers, and did some embroidery on a frame, and read a little, Kate in the downstairs study was correcting printers' errors in reproducing Horace Blake's last work, while he looked on as Surot had made him look on.

How could she do it? Long years of training under Horace had taken off the fine edge of her susceptibilities. He had no doubt hardened her, and intellectually she needed broad, almost coarse effects to excite her



admiration. From a child she had had a cult for success. The ambition that was missing in her father's composition was curiously strong in her. The *rôle* of the iconoclast glorified by her contemporaries had a huge fascination for her. She was back in the old atmosphere charged with electricity, with excitement, with defiance, with the security of fame. She had no right to find excuses for anything and everything he had written; she had no right to delight in the evil and daring of his genius while he spumed out the horror of that last play.

At last it was nearly finished, and Kate noticed that the proofs had taken her about five weeks. Anything that recalled the passing of the wintry days made her think of Stephen. She wished he had written again. And while she was wishing to know more of him, he was standing on her doorstep, and as she tied up a bundle of proofs he was shown into the room.

"I have done all I could by myself," he explained a moment later. "I can go no farther without seeing you again, so I came home. I crossed last night. I am in all sorts of difficulties, as to details, dates, the circumstances of the publication of the first plays. I 'm afraid I shall give you a great deal of trouble."

"I don't mind that."

They were both silent. Kate looked quietly at the dark face and the clear eyes. She had liked him from their first meeting. He looked thin and tired.

"It will take hours and hours," he said.

"All right," said Kate with her motherly smile.

"And where am I to see you?" He looked straight at her.

"Here," she answered.

"You want to know if I am alone," she went on

after a moment's pause. "I am not; Trix is at home."

They both turned their eyes towards the fire.

"Mr. Tempest," she said very gently, "do you know now that there were things I kept out of the book?"

"Yes," he said, "I know about Nancy Potter. How—how is she?"

"Did you know it some time ago?"

"I knew before I was last in this house."

"And it was because you knew——?"

"No, no," said Stephen, "it was because I shall never care for anyone but Trix."

Kate's face was very bright in the firelight.

"I came home that night, and I found Trix shedding such a quantity of tears."

They were both silent. Kate got up.

"I think she is resting in the drawing-room. It must be just as you like."

Stephen looked as if what he would like would be to return to the pavement of Eccleston Square as soon as possible.

"I shan't startle Trix—surprise her?" said Stephen anxiously.

"Oh, no!" Kate smiled at him.

He went upstairs and found Trix lying on a couch in the firelight, with open, dreaming eyes.

He stood in the shadow in the middle of the room until she saw that he was there, and then she put her hands over her eyes.

"Is it any use to talk now?"—his voice sounded harsh.

Trix got up slowly and then held out her hand to him. He took it and tried to speak, but he could not.

There was something in her gesture of welcome that was very grave and gentle.

Then they sat down opposite to each other. He was surprised to feel at once that she was absolutely at her ease; absolutely at home with him and with herself. The embarrassment of their last interview had gone altogether for Trix. He did not know that he was to her the one human being with whom she felt absolutely herself. The silence of the first moments gave him time to realise her, and the intensely nervous condition which he could not analyse relaxed in her presence. Still he did not know what he was going to say. He was annoyed at his own words when they did come:

"Trix, why did you send me away?"

"Oh, I was so miserable; you can't think how miserable I was. You must let me talk and talk and talk before you say anything at all to me."

"If you mean to send me away again," he muttered.

"Stephen, if you don't let me say all I want to say. . . ." She got up and went to stand by him.

He looked at her with a sad little smile.

"Sit down, Trix, and I 'll listen," he said.

"And now I don't know where to begin,"—she had sat down close to him, and the eyes that had captured the sunlight when they had first opened on the world and had kept it in their depths ever since shone ruddy in the firelight. Stephen lost his extreme *malaise* in a more definite anxiety.

"Was n't it dreadful in the train?" she said abruptly. "But I was so miserable at quarrelling with you that it made me understand—" She hesitated.

"Oh! Trix, was it as soon as that? Why I only

really knew it then myself." They looked at each other as if these were tidings of infinite importance.

Stephen leaned his elbow on the mantelpiece. "Blessed be that express train. But, Trix——"

"Oh! let me talk first, Stephen. What was it made you change about . . . about my father?"

"I had just read the papers."

"Was n't it too awful? To think . . . I can't bear it. I can't, I can't." She buried her face in her hands. "I have never said anything about him to anybody. I never could. But you had a shock too." She looked up with tears on her cheeks. "Think of him in the church, think of him with you and me by the sea in the sunset. When I think of his smile that last night after I had been reading to him and he talked of his childhood to me and I thought he was— Ah! how I am haunted by it. I dreamt for weeks that someone smiled at me and I smiled back, and then the smile changed into a devil's grin. And—" She hurried on—"It was all so absurd, my devotion to him, and my thinking myself so much wiser about him than mother. Only it was all too bad to be absurd. If it had not been for mother, I think I should have killed myself."

"Did n't I come in at all?" asked Stephen.

"I did n't know you cared. I think you only made things worse, because——"

Stephen looked down at her bent head in silence. She gave a sob.

"Trix—let us just both of us together put it right behind us. It can only hurt if you let it hurt. I believe that most people have a bad time to get through before they are allowed to be happy, now that has been our bad time, and it 's over."



"But the facts are not over," said Trix in a low, indistinct murmur which he could hardly catch.

"There is only one real fact, and that is our love," he said firmly.

"But I am his daughter." The rest he hoped that she could not say.

"And I am not mother's daughter."

It was done now.

"Trix, if you love me enough you will do what I say—forget the past, leave it. It is a difficult thing to do at first, but both our lives depend on your being brave enough to do it. Only a brave woman could do it."

"If I loved you enough," said Trix quietly, "I should refuse to marry you. I should love you always, only . . ."

"Nonsense," said Stephen. "Trix, I won't have that sort of love, do you hear? I can refuse it if I choose. I suppose you can't force it on me if I won't take it. I 'm only going to have the real thing. I 've let you talk, and now, please, it 's my turn, only I want you just to go through that old formula. I like the old ritual. Just say 'yes' in the right place. Will you marry me, Trix?"

"I don't know."

Stephen still felt anxious. It seemed so tremendously obvious that it should be all right, but Trix had always had an element of the mysterious, and the aloofness of another soul frightened him.

"It 's come to this," he said, "you must take me or leave me, Trix. Don't deceive yourself with any nonsense about doing me a cruel wrong for my own sake."

She leaned forward and covered her face with her hands.

"Trix, will you look at me and answer my question?"

She looked at him, at the little smile which expressed the strong will to keep them both from the terrible abyss of mistakes which he felt was close before them.

"I 've not told you half I meant to say." She sighed and put her hand to her forehead. "I can't help it," she said at last.

"I can't help it," she reiterated, and getting up began to walk up and down the room. He had a moment's fear of the door, but she did not get near it.

"I can't help it, I must. Oh," she said, speaking across the room to Stephen with the full confidence she had always felt towards the one friend with whom she had ever been wholly at ease, "I must be happy; I can't help it."

The change in his face startled Trix.

"Stephen, you look so strange."

"What do you suppose these minutes have been to me?"

"I 'll never, never make you unhappy again."

"I should have liked to have actually heard the answer I asked for."

"How silly you are! Well, 'yes,' then—is that enough?"

"It 's enough for all practical purposes."

The words jested, but his face did not jest as they stood holding each other's hands, and then he took her in his arms.

"Come and tell me all the rest," he murmured.

"I 'm too happy to talk now," said Trix.



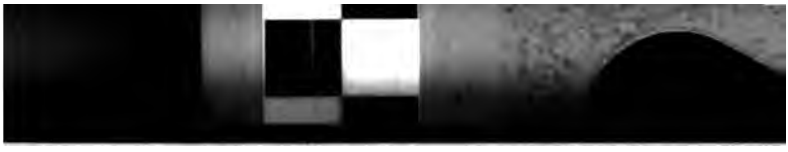
Downstairs Kate sat very still. She was so glad, and so solitary that a mighty sense of the greatness of human life and of the infinite reach of the soul came over her.

IX

AUX GRANDS CŒURS TOUT EST PETIT

THE installation of the ex-*curé*, henceforth to be known as M. l'Abbé Fabre, in a small house near the village, had been carried out not long after his resignation. He seemed interested in its arrangements, and he made jokes about his tiny flower-garden and his tiny *potager*, and how he intended to show what could be done by a small boy acting under a master-mind. But the new *curé* knew him too well not to detect that the old man was nervous as to the move, and, once in the little house to which many of his old parishioners had brought the most varied offerings possible, the symptoms of nervousness only increased. The *curé* watched to see if *le tout petit* had noticed what alarmed him.

"What can he be afraid of?" he asked himself. But he did not like to question his colleague about what seemed to be some private, intimate trouble. The two busy priests gave all the time they could spare to sit with him, or, on his better days to help him down to the beach. He missed the outlook on the sea from the presbytery, and the sound of the waves in his room at night. Once or twice the *curé* was almost sure that his old friend did not want him to stay when he had intended to be with him for some hours, and he never asked either of the priests to have *déjeuner*, or, indeed, any refreshment with him. The tall, stalwart figure was still upright, and



the big face had all its usual gentleness, though its ruddy colour was turning to grey. Still he was not quite himself with his brother priests. One day he asked the *curé* to lead him to the cemetery, and very slowly, stopping by many graves just to say a word of the lives they both knew well, or of those known only to the older man, they came out on the farther side, where a little apart on rising ground there was a mound that had no cross and no flowers. Standing by it the two priests said the *De Profundis*.

Then the old man took a deep breath of the cold air that came across the water. His mind was full of memories of the dead whose bodies had been laid in the graves behind him.

"I never loved any soul so quickly or more deeply than that one," he said, looking away from the sea to the long mound at their feet.

"He had a great reputation," said the *curé*, for whom fame had always had its allurements. "He had done great things. Tiens! we did not know what a great man we had here." The fascination of the dramatist's personality and his achievement were great to the man with the poet's nature, whose ambitions had finally fixed themselves on another world.

"The greatest thing in his life was his death." He spoke gently, almost to himself.

"And Mademoiselle?" queried the *curé*.

The old man sighed.

"She has not written for months. Poor child! Under certain circumstances I am to give her some papers left by her father, but as I cannot keep in touch with her I cannot know if the circumstances have arisen."

"The mother was hard," said the *curé*.

"No, no, no," answered the other with an intensity that surprised his companion. "For her I have the utmost respect."

He was silent, absorbed in the story of the Blakes, wondering about the child whom he had refused to receive into the Church.

"How to distinguish imagination from faith!" he murmured to himself.

Then they went back through the graves, and from the tombstones seemed to rise the drama of the suffering and the failures and the triumphs of human souls.

Then as they passed through the village street, greeted on all sides as they went, the old man leaning on the *curé's* arm, began to hurry and he looked nervously at the clock in the watchmaker's window. It was nearly four. He stopped.

"I won't take you any farther," he said in the new, nervous manner, and the colour on his big, loose cheeks deepened. "Good-night. Thank you, thank you."

The *curé* protested that he would rather see him to his house, but the old man became almost petulant and they parted. The *curé* was hurt and puzzled, but he had no time to spare and he strode swiftly away and was soon going at a great pace along the top of the cliff. He had a bad case to deal with, over which his mind was troubled. He felt strongly in the matter, and feared his responsibility.

Meanwhile the old priest had got home and opened his unlocked front door.

"Late as usual," said a cross voice loudly in the kitchen, and the old man shivered a little as he moved into the small square sitting-room.



"No keeping of hours in this house," the voice went on, and somebody murmured in agreement.

He rose and shut the door of the room, but he could not help hearing something about "up in the night—no repose."

The milk-tea the doctor had ordered for his daily "*quatre heures*" was not brought for another ten minutes. Then the broad-faced Breton with thin, iron-grey hair, surrounded by the frill of a white cap, flounced into the room and put a tray with a little bang on the table beside him.

"It is already twenty minutes past four," she said, "and M. le Médecin said four o'clock."

M. l'Abbé did not answer. He was feeling weak and sick, but he lost nothing of his usual dignity of appearance, which had begun to be a source of grievance to his servant. He was as grand as ever he was when he was M. le Curé—not a word of friendly gossip to be got out of him.

The tea was weak; the boiled milk was burnt. M. l'Abbé made himself drink it, and then sat still in the dark.

"I did disturb her in the night," he said to himself, "but the state of things is wrong for her as well as for me."

But yet, what was to be done? She had been an admirable servant for many years in the presbytery, and no doubt it was hard in her old age to move into a tiny house and have the care of an invalid while she was not too strong herself. He alone had known of the change in her temper for the worse during the last few years, and he had foreseen that it would be out of the question for her to remain at the presbytery after he had left it. And what could be done? Unlike

many Frenchwomen she had not saved money, and there were no funds with which to pension her. He had expected to find her a little difficult, but he had had no anticipation of the life she would lead him when he was in her power and without anyone else in the house. Her idea of the present situation was to take as much rest as possible after a hard life, and to nurse her grievance at being obliged to leave the presbytery. Any latent cruelty was certain to develop in such a state of mind. Presently he lighted the lamp; he did so many little things now rather than ring the bell, which might or might not be answered; and set himself to read his Office, and the great words he loved soothed and raised him.

" 'Aux petits cœurs tout est grand, Aux grands cœurs tout est petit,'" he murmured to himself as he shut the old worn breviary.

X

AS TO THE *CAHIER* I KNOW NOTHING

KATE spent two days after Trix's wedding in winding up the tiresome business it had involved, that seemed useless and dreary now that the event was over. Kate missed Trix, but the fundamental fact that it was not her own child who had left her unconsciously made the great difference. She was not given to self-analysis, or to looking too closely into painful thoughts. Only it was easier now to turn to her own interests. As Trix had put her arms round her for the last "good-bye" Kate had not known anything but a deep sense of her loss. She watched her with her grave, happy face smiling tenderly at her. It was the awful venture of marriage that moved Kate's thoughts at that moment. For the time there was little that a mother could feel that she had not felt in doubts and fears, in spite of her affection for Stephen.

But still, after some days had passed, Kate was half-consciously ready to enjoy her freedom. There was nothing that need be untrue in her actions or her looks now. She put away the wedding-veil she had lent Trix in its cedar box and she seemed to hear Mrs. George Shenstone in her high-pitched voice saying three or four times at least at the wedding-feast: "I love the old lace veil; it was her mother's and her grandmother's wedding-veil, you know. I love the link it makes with her past, don't you?"

Now Kate need not even see the Shenstones. She could do, and she meant to do, exactly what she liked. Two earlier plays of Blake's were to be revived and she knew that she would be consulted during the rehearsals. Then in two weeks' time the last play would be out. Kate went to her sitting-room four days after the wedding and determined to enjoy her evening. She took from the shelf an old volume of her father's essays which she had not read for years. She turned to a favourite essay on the "Postulates of Ethics," and she began reading with the feeling of freedom that only comes after a time of much business fretted with wearisome details. But the sense of detachment was delusive, she thought she was paying attention until she realised that she had turned over two pages by mistake without detecting the hiatus. She put the book down open on her knee, a little startled and disturbed. She was not free yet; she had imagined she was going to enjoy a renewal of old thoughts, old mental energies, but she could not.

She found she had really been thinking of Trix while she tried to think of ethics. What perfect tact of the heart Trix had shown during her short engagement. The simplicity with which she had accepted Stephen's devotion and Kate's love had gone far to diminish the unacknowledged difficulties of the position. If Trix had had more self-love she must have been sensitive and difficult. A more spoiled nature might have been unconsciously tyrannous to the two who were so bent on her happiness. She had ceased to be morbid about the secret as to her own birth, and Kate realised that that had really involved some generous self-control. It was surely because that effort had been made for the sake of others that she had gained a gentle,



unconscious dignity in her attitude all through. They had really been very happy—happy in all the details of the trousseau and the wedding, and Kate had been surprised at how much pleasure she had taken in making the material side of it all very charming. She smiled as she sat alone with a real feminine satisfaction at the successes she had achieved.

Then she gave a sharp sigh. There is always a little reaction after such a time as she had just passed through. She had to face her own life alone. She wanted to be free, to live a large life of her own, with wide interests and intellectual energies. But could she?

If her mind were free now of any care for Trix, it was not therefore really free. It had more room than ever for Horace to occupy. The book had fallen on the ground. She went over and over the long years of her married life, until time after time she came back to the last month of his illness. Very gradually she began to wish that she had not shrunk from the one witness of those last weeks who had wanted to tell her many details that no one else could tell her. Trix had been silenced when she wanted to speak, and probably now she would never again see clearly the things that she had known then. The shock of the discovery must have warped her view even where it had not almost wiped the facts out of her memory.

Kate was beginning to wish to know even what would be repulsive, because from among the repulsive things that she suspected—the false piety, the self-deception, the childishness—might it not be possible to glean some notes of natural human tenderness, some characteristic touches that would not be pure pain? At moments she felt that she must read Trix's

sketch of those last days, just because ignorance of any kind about him was becoming more unbearable than painful knowledge. To-day she got up twice with the intention of going to fetch the MS. Trix had given her at the cottage from her room upstairs, and twice she sat down, unable to do it. She felt weak and very lonely. We dream of freedom from ties as if that freedom would make us more ourselves, but it rarely does—it only showed Kate the greatness of her needs to-day. Presently the evening post was brought to her.

There was a card from Trix, a bill, and a small, thick packet from St. Jean des Pluies; she saw the postmark at once. She read the happy little card from Varenna and then tore open the parcel. There was a short letter from the ex-*curé*, a small paper note-book, and an envelope with the words "For Trix" written on it in Horace's writing.

The *curé*, in stiff, courteous language, wrote to the effect that this enclosure for Mademoiselle and the little *cahier* had been left for him by Monsieur. It seemed that Horace had told the old man a few days before his death that he wished him to take charge of a letter for his daughter, to be given to her if she became aware of the secret of her birth, but it was not brought to him by Roberts until the day after Blake's death.

"Madame," he concluded, "I am myself so unlikely to live that I wish to give these to you now. I am convinced that Mr. Blake would have wished you to have them. He had decided to ask you to read and to keep the letter to his daughter, but afterwards he thought that it would be better for her to receive it

from one who was not a member of the family. As to the *cahier* I know nothing, it was never mentioned to me."

Kate took the little parcel up to her room. It was a warm, brilliant night, the birds still chirped at intervals in the Square. She sat, dressed in a loose violet wrapper, on the big, chintz-covered sofa on which her father used to rest, and she stayed reading for hours puzzling over scraps of pencil or blotted entries in the little *cahier*, for it was to the *cahier* that she turned at once. It was made of thin, poor paper, all tiny squares of purple lines, on which he had written scraps and quotations, and made memoranda after his constant habit. There was no sequence, no order at all. There seldom had been in the note-books of which he had made so much use for his plays.

Here, Kate felt, might be knowledge at last. She had no strong wish to read the letter to Trix, which she put carefully away, but the note-book—just like dozens of his old note-books—was a link with their past, just one book more in which he had written after his manner, for it was his nature to write rather than to speak. There was an extraordinary sense of familiarity, of intimate intercourse with him in the act of reading.

The first entry he had scrawled in pencil:

"Pascal may call 'la recherche de la gloire' the greatest baseness in man, but what a gorgeous defence of it follows."

"But what would Pascal have said to my clinging to my last wish for success? Even the *curé* was long-

ing to find a way out, he wanted to read the play! He hoped it was not impossible for a Christian! Even he would love me to have another success. It is nature *plus forte que tout.* But I think I regret it most for Kate's sake. I have always given her pain, but I have given her success. With her it has been a vicarious passion and purer and stronger in consequence. The whole of that *Pensée* is even truer of Kate than of me."

"I do mind less and less about that play. I ought not to mind at all. I sincerely hate it, it is the lowest down thing in the writing way that I have ever done. I don't believe I could read it through again. Kate has made no protest. I think she must in her heart have condemned it too."

"I can't get away from Pascal, but to me the mystery is that I, a vicious man, should be able to understand so completely what he felt on that great night of his conversion, Monday, 23rd November, 1654. What would Kate say to that amazing document? Why do I see its meaning when she would not? Is it because the worst needs most help? Then to the good who look on how strange this must seem. I need all infinity to cleanse me. The good are forgiven because they forgive the bad. What a big, glorious thing will be the forgiveness of the woman who has forgiven me."

" 'Il faut savoir douter où il faut, assurer où faut, en se soumettant où il faut.' "

" 'La piété est différente de la superstition. Soutenir la piété jusqu'à la superstition c'est la détruire.' But how to distinguish, among these Bretons for

instance, between the two? One thing is clear that things that would be superstitious in me are not superstitious in them. It is superstition to believe what you have no just grounds for believing. My father-in-law carried this precept out farther than anyone I ever met. But he believed in me for a long time, and he certainly had no just ground for that."

" '*Scio cui credidi*,' said Pascal. I have known Him in Whom I have believed. I could not have acted against Him as I have if I had not known Him. My father-in-law was a good man, but if he had not been good, if he had wished to sin, he could never have sinned as I have sinned. My violence showed, as William James says of another case, that 'a Christian education still rankled in his breast.' "

"David said, 'Against Thee only have I sinned,' and yet he had put the husband of the woman he wanted in the forefront of the battle—the meanest, cruelest trick any despot could commit. Can one think that it means that God had the real responsibility of saving the man and the woman David had injured? Anyone *I* have injured God may have saved abundantly. He can reward them and punish me. He is punishing and will punish me. His justice appeals to my own small sense of justice. Just punishment is truth in action. Punishment is truth insisted upon."

"The *curé* says that the *Miserere* has more joy in it than the *Te Deum*. It has mysterious passages that I never understood before. David, who had behaved like a cur, says: 'The hidden things of Thy wisdom

hast Thou made manifest to me.' He boasts of fresh secrets with God."

"So it was with David, but David, with this awful lapse was a holy man. Did David, did Pascal, realise what may happen to a man habitually vile?"

After that came some memoranda on practical points, but two pages farther on he came back to himself:

"I have been reading Huysmans's *En Route*, and I have cried for Durtal as I could not cry for myself. He seems only to have known low, bad women; and I have had Kate for my wife. He is spared much agony. Is it egotism to think out the difference between Durtal and myself? He loved pleasure and found it with women until the creeping devils of the underworld got at him. One is never sure if it is a woman or a devil who haunts him. Women worse than himself were, it seems, the evil influence on him. I was the evil influence on women better than myself."

"Durtal was first drawn away from evil by the beauty of the liturgy, of mysticism, of the spiritual life in ascetic men and women. Durtal was *désenchanté*, bored beyond words, sick of his life. Every step towards his purification was suffering, but the beautiful soothes him till he gets beyond the sense of the beautiful into a naked submission of the will. He was not dying or like to die when his purification began. I was marked for death. I was suffering agonies. I revolted as I had revolted all my manhood against God. I was not sure if my mind believed in God, but I knew that my will hated Him. When

I was marked by death I went on fighting until I was defeated. I lay like a whipped hound at the feet of my Master. If I had had any other resource, any other hope, I would not have turned to Him. That was why the hound had to be whipped within an inch of his life, and he knows it."

"I keep thinking of Durtal. How many people have refused to believe in the cleansing. Too rotten, too far gone. They won't believe it of me, does that matter? Durtal (I call his creator by his name) endured long, fearful suffering before he died. He suffered agony in his eyes, but he refused to take anything to stop the pain because he had sinned with his eyes. I am getting much worse. I know it. I have little time and much to do in it."

"Rotten, unreal, posturing—that is what I said of Durtal when I read the book years ago. I can hear my friends saying all that of me. I do mind that very much, but I won't do anything to prevent it. If only Kate will not think as they will. And yet what chance that, clear-eyed, facing facts, knowing me, never shirking the truth, she can, on the data she has to go upon, think anything else of *me?* Her love will read it mercifully, will excuse me on the score of health and weakness, the power of the priests, my inherited superstitions. But dearest, would I could reach just so far as to make you take all the facts, the fact of God's action on me; the action of the Eternal Powers remaking the vilest thing into a thing of hope and even of love! I am crying in the dark to Kate. Don't excuse me, dearest, don't palliate anything, don't call black white, only seek to know the

truth about me. Rotten, but not unreal now, broken, not posturing. Despairing of life but having hope."

"Kate forgave me. God forgave me. Will she see no likeness, no affinity between her act and God's act? Was her forgiveness the only real fact, the second forgiveness a subjective fancy? A self-deception, a last insincerity? What I long for is that she may recognise a great ethical fact, she would never willingly blind herself to fact. Forgiveness is a fact she has known from experience. Will she deny to the Eternal Powers the noblest action of her own life?"

"Kate knows what it is to forgive. I know what it is to be forgiven."

"So much to do and so little coming of it. Failed to find two to whom I thought I could give money, have sent the hundred to B. D. I wonder what Kate gave her years ago? I must tell Kate how the thousand I have drawn out has been spent. I should like to have built a church at home, but I must give up what is *not* necessary for what is—restitution, reparation. The *curé* here will accept five pounds for the poor, nothing else. I think Kate will be almost rich and Trix I leave to her."

"I feel stronger to-day. I can think more clearly of what has passed, and study it from a psychological standpoint.

"*Point* 1. I half consciously wanted to come to a Catholic country—that was the strong undercurrent.

"*Point* 2. I *told* myself flippantly when I got here



that I could take a reminiscent, merely æsthetic pleasure in the hymns, the processions, the churches, that was a move in self-defence.

"*Point* 3. That proving impossible, I began to feel a violent revulsion against the influence that would go deeper than the surface. William James speaks of 'letting loose the subconscious allies behind the scenes.' I would not let them loose.

"*Point* 4. The fight produced the upheaval of the worst in me, the revolt against the elements in me that were subconsciously working for rearrangement, redemption. The upheaval found expression in the play. The peculiarity of my sin, the individual secret of it was that I knew I was using my perception of higher things, the esoteric knowledge implanted in a Christian childhood, for dramatic effect. That alone would have been my special reason for insisting on the destruction of the play.

"*Point* 5. The exhaustion that followed the writing of the play was in proportion to the effort made, it left the mental and ambitious faculties practically dead. In that empty, blank exhaustion there was space for gentler memories whispering half-heard in the agony. It was the agony of knowing that I should work no more, and only live to die.

"*Point* 6. The fight had been so bitter, though I did not know it, because higher and holier things were very near. But they did not come to fill the emptiness then. I knelt down at the procession—I don't know why. The *curé* does not attach much importance to what made me do that, nor does he think there was anything supernatural in what followed. 'The imagination is not the soul' is one of his favourite quotations. Yet it was a symptom, no doubt, of that faint

effort towards readjustment against which all the rest of me was in revolt."

"After I had seen the *curé* and shown him my soul sick unto death, with flippant comments and personal impertinence, things seemed to settle down. But I did in some faint way respond to higher impulses. Was I 'letting loose subconscious allies' at last? I tried to be kind to Roberts, I was less self-indulgent. I made one or two efforts at self-control. I burned the rotten stuff which had amused me, but I felt cynical as I watched the slow burning. I puzzled Roberts by saying that our vices leave us, not we our vices. Then came more illness and far more acute despair."

"It is nothing very unusual, as seen in such records of conversion as I have been able to find, that immediately before help came I suffered mentally as I never suffered before for some nights and days. It seems, as far as it can be understood psychologically at all, that the struggle for readjustment was at the most acute stage, while to me there seemed no light, *no fight*, no possibility of change."

"It seemed a state of absolute cold reasoning, the mind working with resistless logic, driving home, rubbing in ruthlessly the facts of disease, suffering, death, and at the same time throwing a horrible light on the moral side; making its repulsiveness appear quite clear and undisguised—no hope, no self-respect, no fruition to come, nothing but agony. And while the mind refused faith of any kind there was what seemed the nag of superstition that grew stronger as time went on, a fear of future punishment that had none of the hope or courage or submission of faith."



"As I understand the view of the modern psychologist (it appeals to me as a fairly true analysis), meanwhile the floods of other influence were rising in the subconscious regions of the soul. The state of the mind became unbearable, it hanged itself in its own rope, so to speak, of a logic that ignored the great powers of the universe, ignored anything beyond itself. The breaking-point was reached, the barriers were broken down, the readjustment took place—the human being that was torn and divided reached to a unity that amazed itself."

"It was at one with itself because it was at one with the universe, at one with the Eternal Powers. It seemed that Light forced itself into the darkness, a great wind blew into the stifled consciousness and the whole nature turned from a nightmare to an awakening of an incomparable clearness. At the same time the sense of individual nothingness and unworthiness —no, I can't go on, I never shall be able to go on. There is no coal of fire to cleanse my lips. That fire is for the prophets, not for me. All my life I have put *everything* into words, now I have no words for what has been done to me. I could not tell even Kate any more, near as we are together. This impossibility of saying more is terrible. I can leave myself to God, but it is very hard to leave her to Him. My Master answers, 'What is it to thee if I leave her to wait until I come?'"

"To see things the same eye to eye—it cannot be in this world. If Kate came here what a thousand causes of irritation! The old *curé* and his bows—Trix taking flowers to the church—Kate avoiding the

church herself, or going into it, and if going in, seeing me kneel before a poor statue of Our Lady of Lourdes, one of 'the idols' manufactured by the thousand in Paris—with false flowers in vases; stupid-looking, cow-faced women, Trix kneeling by me while I said my rosary. The confessional! I have taught Kate to hate it all. No, I must not ask her to come here. We should fret openly or in silence. I must go back to England. I have been cowardly, dreading her coming, fearing a failure in what matters far the most, that we should understand each other. I must go home and then I can go quietly to church, worry her as little as possible—try only to show her my love. Or I could stay in London if she likes. I have not much hope of her understanding, but I can hope to draw so near together in will that the darkness will be bearable."

"I have spoken to Roberts about the return to England. I see he is afraid of the journey—thinks it may be very painful—but would be glad to get back."

"Everything is changed to me by this new plan of the French doctor. Kate is sure to come here with him. I know I could not stand Paris. But coming here with this doctor—she will be full of the cure. And I can't be cured—I can only be tortured. Life, if I once think of life—oh, how terrible is this confusion! And they are wrong, it is making me far more ill. Yet the least I can do is to do what Kate wishes."

"Dr. Saumur thinks it worth while to come—is coming, but no word of Kate coming. What does it mean?"

The writing was uncertain, blotted now.

"I never thought she would shrink from coming. Has it been too much, this time away from me? Was it too much, my leaving her? Is she angry with me? Does she not want to come? Why did I make so sure? Everything in heaven and earth is in darkness."

"Dr. Saumur wants me to have some preparation before the examination; it is all delayed, dragged out, and no word from Kate—I can't understand. Oh, I want Kate—I must have Kate—my mind is failing me—is my will failing too?"

The last entry was so faint she could never be quite clear as to its meaning. It seemed to be this:

"Kate was ill—why did they not tell me? She is better—she is coming—My God, will she understand?"



XI

THE ETERNAL HORACE

IT was two months after the wedding and Stephen had come up to London for the day. It was glorious weather and suited well with his mood. He had left Trix with his mother in his old home, and he thought that they were getting on admirably together. They had gone straight to his home on getting back to England. Kate had been away on a visit in the north, and there had been nothing to take him up to London until he received a curt note from Edward Hales, asking to see him on a matter of business.

There is an indefinable aroma of prosperity and self-satisfaction about the newly-married. Edward Hales decided that Stephen had it in no blatant fashion, and yet it was there. When two people have spent their days in telling each other how especially delightful they are, and this in a manner and time approved and consecrated by all human tradition, there must be some result traceable in voice and visage.

"Sorry to have brought you up for this," said Hales, after a hearty greeting, "but I could not put what I wanted to say in a letter."

Stephen was, in fact, a good deal bored at having to come to London just then.

"I 'm rather absorbed in the biography."

"Ah!" said Hales with interest.

They were sitting now much as they had sat in the little back study when Stephen had confided in Hales that he was to write Blake's Life.

"Ah!" repeated Hales, turning at once from any other point. "How goes it?"

"Oddly enough, I think it goes well."

"All things go well with you," murmured Hales kindly.

"Yes, perhaps it is a general optimism, but the strange thing is that a few weeks before I married I thought I must give it up—it seemed impossible. I loathed him so, but now . . ."

"You have really come round to him under a new influence," said Hales.

Stephen flushed. What would be Hales's astonishment if he knew that Stephen had never once alluded to her father's Life in his wife's presence?

"No," he said, "but I find that hatred is nearly as good a motive power as love or admiration."

Hales dared not ask how this attitude was possible in Trix's husband. He had scented a mystery before; he went carefully now, and was silent.

"Which is best from a literary point of view, for a biographer to love a man and be candid as to his faults, or to hate him and be candid as to his gifts and virtues?" Stephen put the question.

"I will tell you when I have read your book. Of course, it is about Horace Blake—the eternal Horace Blake—that I want to see you. I know, among other interesting cads, a young man called Green, who works, as a clerk I think, for Brown & Puck. Green has always been a crude adorer of Blake's. I forget how he came across Mrs. Blake, but it seems that it was at his suggestion that the firm approached her,

and I suppose you know that they were to have published his last play a month ago?"

"Yes, I have been meaning to ask why it is not out."

"Well," said Hales slowly, "Green confides in me that the play is not delayed, but stopped altogether; the type is to be destroyed, every pull printed to be produced and burnt with the typewritten copy. It seems the MS. had been already destroyed. Conceive such barbarity! A whole Blake play to disappear, and she has no more right to do it than the widow of Wren would have had to blow up St. Paul's. I 've been counting the days, almost the hours, since I saw the play advertised. And now . . ." he stamped his foot on his worn Turkey carpet, "I shall never read *The Burning Bush*, never know what Blake's last, and perhaps greatest, work contained!"

Stephen knew that Blake had been a constant preoccupation with Hales—that he had admired and hated him in almost equal degrees. But he was hardly prepared for the depths of his disappointment. That was a surface impression, while his thought flashed back to Kate's first mention of the play, how she had told him as a great piece of good news that she had received the third act, and that she was inclined to think it was her husband's greatest work.

"I 'm trying to remember exactly what happened at the time," said Stephen. "Blake told me himself that he had asked his wife to destroy the play. I had just been seeing her and I felt sure she had not obeyed him. Well, I rashly let him see that I believed that it was *not* destroyed, and I 'm sure—as sure as I am that I 'm speaking to you now—that he was very glad." Stephen stood up and looked into the little

blank square yard behind the house. "My idea is that he had promised the *curé* to have it destroyed, and had told her to destroy it, but that all along he hoped she would not do it. He satisfied the priest and his own substitute for a conscience by giving an order which he did not believe would be obeyed. When I got back to England I asked her point-blank whether it was burnt. She confided in me that it was not destroyed, and I told her the impression I had had that he would be very glad."

"Have you read it?"

"No, I have n't. She evidently did not want me to read it, so I have waited like the rest of the world."

"Green has seen parts, and says it is magnificent, gorgeous, 'very hot.' As far as I can get at any reflection of it through his muddled, vulgar, but genuine enthusiasm, it must be an astonishing performance. I asked you to come simply to see if you could save it."

"I can't interfere with her," said Stephen sadly. "But I wonder, did she give the publishers any explanation? I can't conceive what can have made her change. She had corrected the proofs, she knew it by heart, she was looking forward to its publication as the greatest thing that could happen to her."

He sat down and seemed absorbed in thought.

"I have not seen her since I married. She has been away on a visit in the north."

"Mrs. Blake wrote to Brown & Puck that she had found some papers which showed her that he had wished the play to be destroyed. Could it be something he had signed at the *curé's* orders?"

Stephen did not answer.

"So much depends on what the play really is," he said at length.

"Nothing depends on that," said Hales angrily; his rough red hair seemed to rise in protest. "He was not imbecile, the thing is a genuine work of a great genius; no one has the right to deprive you or me or anyone else of what belongs to the human race."

"She might be speaking herself!" said Stephen sadly. "I have such faith in her that I can't believe she will have thrown over her own views and principles without . . ."

Hales interrupted him almost rudely.

"Can't the woman see that she will do him far more harm by this preposterous suppression? There will be the wildest notions of the iniquity of the suppressed play. And as to herself, she will be a by-word in the history of literature!"

Stephen was getting angry.

"Damn the history of literature! She is too great a woman to think of herself."

"But she might think of him, she might think of the world!"

"Look here," said Stephen, trying to speak coolly, "I am going to do my best. I shall go to her now and see what can be done. I said I could not interfere, but I believe I ought. Only remember this, Hales, whatever she does about this, she is acting against all her own deepest wishes; if she destroys it she is doing it for no petty reason."

"That 's no comfort to me," said Hales. "I don't care one way or another about Mrs. Blake's motives. If she commits this crime, her motives won't make the thing any better. You 're going? Well, I 'm afraid you will be weak with her, but I can't think of any-

body else. Remember there will be a tremendous outcry, and you are not the man to enjoy that. Well, good-bye, I must see your wife some day." His habitual gruff kindness was struggling with his deep irritation. "I was sorry I could not be at your wedding—I can't face those functions." Then suddenly he burst out again, "For Heaven's sake, save that play!"

Stephen walked very slowly away from the house. He had his own share of the older man's consuming passion for great literature, and he could not believe that Kate's passion for the glory of Horace Blake was not a greater thing yet. He felt that he was at the outskirts of a mystery and he dreaded to penetrate further.

XII

WHY DIDN'T YOU UNDERSTAND?

KATE was leaning back in a deep chair in the drawing-room: the subdued sunshine passed softly through the blinds. Stephen loved the room for Trix's sake, and for the immense satisfaction it gave to the eyes by day or night. To-day, nervous as he was, he felt the impression of charm as he came in. As Kate came forward he thought he saw a change in her face—she looked to him as if she had been ill, she was surely very white and thin.

She shook hands and then put her left hand on his arm for a moment.

"I know what you have come about, Stephen," she said. "You have heard what I have done?"

Stephen steeled himself—he would be true to his own convictions.

"I am aghast," he said.

Kate gave a weary sigh. She sank back into her chair and waited. Stephen tried to put the case strongly, tried to make her see things even as Hales saw them. She let him go on, watching him sadly, but her eyes were bright. He thought it might be the brightness of tears.

"Oh, I hate having to say all this to you!" he cried. "If it were not of such deadly importance nothing in Heaven or earth would make me trouble you."

"I know that," said Kate very gently.

She had not always been gentle with him. He

could recall how the low thunder of her tones had passed over his head when they had disagreed before.

"But, Stephen, don't you know that I think all you have just said, and feel it, or rather have felt it, with terrible pain, pain you can hardly imagine? Do you not understand, too, that I realise that wherever Horace's name is honoured, I shall always be blamed for destroying that last play?"

It was in her mind that it would never be known how she had fostered his genius, lived for it, suffered for it, that she would be a by-word for a scrupulous, ignorant, intolerable woman who had robbed the world of a master-piece. Enormous as the loss of the play must appear to Stephen, it was nothing to the magnitude of the loss to Kate herself.

"I thought so," cried Stephen. "I knew. I knew my ideas about this were only a shadow of your own ideas, but then . . ."

"All I can say is that I know his wishes now quite plainly. Also I know, and this is the strange thing, that though it is a crime to destroy a work of genius, it may be a greater crime to give life to an evil thing. I have learned that also from him. The question as to which is the greater sin in this case might be an insoluble problem for me, but I have no doubt that while he was living he had the right to destroy his own creation. It was a trick that deceived him, he was tricked out of his rights. That is to me, now the conclusive argument. Stephen"—her low voice had a beseeching note that was new to him,—"you and I know each other enough for me to ask you to trust me. In kindness and pity leave this matter alone. You were right to come, right to say what you have said, but need you say any more?"

Stephen felt a pang at his heart, but he could not give in so easily.

"Only one thing, I must force myself to say one thing more. Was he quite himself, in full possession of his mind, when he decided this question?"

Kate sat forward, covered her face with her hands; then she got up and walked to the window and stood with her back to him.

"He was absolutely himself," she said in a low voice and then she came back into the room and stood by the chimney-piece. There was a change in her face, there was no longer any expression of distress or petition, she seemed to be at a distance from him, preoccupied. She certainly was changed—he felt nervous. There was something deeply impressive in the tall figure and the rapt white face. A little smile came on her lips and went again, and she spoke with evident difficulty and no acute sense of the presence of her listener.

"I thought that his faculties had been weakened—that the effort of the play had exhausted him." Her left hand lay on the corner of the marble chimney-piece, she pressed the right one on it. "I thought, too, that when his mind was weakened he had sunk altogether into superstitions and self-delusions.

"Soon after your wedding I received from the old *curé* a letter for Trix, written by Horace, which I must give you, and a little copy-book with notes of his own of the kind he was always making. I have read the notes and at last I have read what Trix wrote for you.

"I had done what my father always condemned. I had made up my mind, before I knew the evidence, that I could judge exactly what happened to Horace at the end. With all—" she hesitated, "in spite of

all my love I had judged him incapable of any higher life. I had so long schooled myself to take him as he was that I had a settled opinion of him. I could sum up what I supposed happened at the end as superstition, cowardice, and melodrama. But, Stephen—" She turned towards him with flashing eyes. "He did change—change utterly. He was calm, brave, honest, utterly honest. He was not priest-ridden, for he clearly speaks for himself, and with singularly characteristic touches." She covered her face with her hands. "He—but I can't talk of it, Stephen, only conceive what it is to know that he was purified, raised to a higher life, that he faced death as bravely as my father faced it."

Stephen had never seen her cry before. He was astonished as well as exceedingly touched. And yet his judgment almost at once told him that it was absurd to be surprised; this was much more natural than any state of mind that had gone before. Loving Horace's memory as she did, the wonder was that she had not tried to idealise him throughout. This tender little smile coming and going on the strong mouth was much more natural than the stern lines in which it had been set before. It had come at last, the soft mist of illusion, and he could not grudge it, but in a moment he realised the enormous change in their positions. She had rebuked him sternly for his idealising attitude at first, she who knew Horace too well. "He was a bad man but a great one"—he heard the stern, vehement note that had been in her voice when she said that. As in a dream that other talk shadowed this one. In the midst of a sympathy that hurt him, the practical view would insist on recognition. What conceivable measure could there be between the

Horace Blake of the book that was now growing fast and this latest Horace seen through these tears?

"I lowered my standards," he heard her say, "debased my mind to excuse him, to suit myself to him so uselessly and basely, and then he was cleansed. It is of a terrible cleansing that his words speak and of which unconsciously Trix gives evidence; perhaps that cleansing did not even end with his death. Stephen, there is something so living in those papers that strangely, perhaps unreasonably, I have come to think of Horace as if he were living now. The idea is stronger than I am. I told myself when I first became conscious of it, that it was merely the hereditary inclination of the descendant of Christians; but that would not explain it or stop it—Horace is living a life of expiation. Does that seem terrible to you? I don't know how or where, but I know I can live it with him."

Stephen felt almost irritably conscious of the beauty of the idea that was being revealed to him. Easily, half-consciously, he had taken for granted that there was a future life; when his father died, he had taken comfort for his mother and himself in what is called a future hope. But the beauty and the pathos of this hope dawning now in Kate's heart, a light revealed through the insistence of her love, struck him immensely. And yet there was a repulsion he could not quite keep under. Horace's spirit as a thing of evil was constantly present with him now, he had felt as if the biography must demoralise any writer who did not actually hate him.

"Expiation!" Good Heavens, plenty of that would be needed! Yet nothing in her face betrayed any sense of Stephen being aloof, out of sympathy with



what she was telling him. She was too full of her own thought to be keenly aware of him.

"I go no further than that," she sighed. "What there was in the superstitious practices of his childhood that helped towards the higher life of those last weeks I cannot see. I still feel that I could not speak to that *curé*, to anybody who would think of him as a sacristan's saint. Stephen, he never let them come between him and me. He never left me out in the cold, he was never happy without longing to draw me into it. Can you imagine what it is to me to have him really mine, not anybody else's?"

Ah, there Stephen heard the deep human note. It came from the foundation of her nature; in her the yearning pain of the human heart had been comforted by the infinite greatness of love. He was beginning to be carried out of himself as he had been carried out of himself by other great things,—great music, great art, great poetry; but he was yielding reluctantly because of the exceeding difficulties that must be faced and which it was dangerous to forget.

"If I am never to see him again, it is still a real truth that he was and is mine. And I cannot help the feeling that it is for an infinite future that he is mine, and that our unity is part of a unity with what is greater yet. He appealed to me to understand that what is greatest must be able to do the greatest as well as to be the greatest. The Infinite cannot be denied the power to forgive."

As she stopped on that thought, Stephen took his eyes off her unwillingly—he covered them with his hands. Faintly he seemed to remember that long ago she had thought the Christian doctrine of forgiveness to be immoral—he had answered that when one for-

gave anybody the action did not feel immoral. She had been suddenly moved and he had not known then why his words had struck home to her. As she began to speak again he became simply full of her and her story.

Her mind could not leave the thought of Horace.

"There is nothing in these notes unlike himself. All his life he analysed all that happened to him, he analyses in these notes what passed in himself during those last weeks up to a certain point, but there are sudden reserves. It is as if he said 'Hush, we children must not speak here, this is the Holy of Holies.' Then I feel hushed too. Perhaps I am speaking too much now."

"You can't do that," said Stephen. He had never felt the tender, protective filial instinct more strongly than he felt it now. He did not know that he smiled at her as the only way of sympathy with her tears that flowed so easily.

"But, Stephen, though I can only speak to you, and that, I believe, only this once, the strange thing is that I choose you although you are the person I don't understand. Your goodness first drew me to you."

This strange idea made Stephen feel rather small and unworthy.

"You were better, I knew, by instinct than other men I had met. You are good and you are a Christian. I have been reading the Gospels for the first time, and I see that the main notion in them is that sin is not irremediable. I was taught that there was no such thing as sin, but that there were noble characters and base characters. I never dreamt of the base elements being transmuted into the noblest. But why did you not understand? Trix was not brought up a Christian

as you were. Why, when you read the horrible things I sent you as material for the Life, did not you, who had seen him near the end, you who had read Trix's story, say to me, 'Both are true, the vileness and the nobility that came out of that awful cleansing'? I am not a Christian, but I recognise as absolute truth from the evidence before me that there was a tremendous struggle to be pure, a mysterious strengthening of the will—much peace, if at times a dark peace. But, Stephen, my son, as you are a Christian, *why did you not understand?*"

There was a touch of her old vehemence as she turned upon him with the question. It was the last reproach he could have expected from her, and it added dreadfully to the difficulties of the situation that she should reproach him now from so absolutely different a standpoint, and yet it was perfectly true that he had never thought for a moment of placing Horace Blake within the moral area of the Gospels; indeed, the idea seemed almost to be irreverent. A poor fallen woman, a murderer, a thief—he would have easily believed in their reformation; but like many of us he had half-consciously felt that the line must be drawn somewhere. There were characters so vile and rotten that their very existence was a difficulty, and any real change in them unthinkable. How strangely he remembered at that moment how at their second meeting Kate had asked him if he were a Christian. Now she wanted to understand—she always wanted to get at the core of a question—why his Christianity had not explained her husband to him all along? And he could not answer her. He was startled and greatly troubled. How much had he not thought and struggled and strained! How had he not tried one way and

another way and yet another way in which he might write the Life of Horace Blake! He had seen innumerable difficulties; he had been through so many alternations as to how to write the Life, but he had never realised that the greatest difficulty of all lay in his own limitations. He began to realise it now. Civilised, sympathetic, cultured, reverent as he was, he had never had a large enough scale for his work. Later on he would tell himself contemptuously that he had worked with an inch measure all through, and that even his vision of the realistic picture of Horace had only been a modern decadent taste for impressionism. This view was what was just dawning on him now, but one point was already clear and convincing. It had been the mistake of this strange, vehement friend of his to suppose him capable.

"I have worked at it this way and the other way and every way," he said at last, and his voice broke for a moment. "Let me give up. You may be right, that I ought to have understood his life as you understand it now, but you see I did not. I can't tell now where I am to blame, or how differently I might have acted had I been a bigger man or a Christian such as you would expect a Christian to be. I did not understand it as you do now. I doubt if I ever shall. And so you must let me give it up."

At that moment the ordinary values of life were all changed for him. Yet it could not be said that he did not suffer for the loss of his work, the loss of the hope of fame, of success. Only he discerned the impossibility of the task, he felt that it was beyond the compass of his powers, and he was too sincere as an artist and as a man to be willing to undertake what he honestly felt to be beyond him.



There had been a little silence during which she watched him with a tender, puzzled kindness. She had never felt so conscious of his youth, of the untried element in him that seemed a promise of distant rather than of present achievement.

"Stephen,"—she spoke with hesitation—"could you not take in on your canvas the whole truth—extenuate nothing, neither the sins nor the great change? Trix's story, as you used to ask me, you could put in bodily. It is exquisite. If you can enlarge your conception to grasp the whole truth, go on. If not, Stephen, you are right: it would be better to give it up."

Stephen stood up and looked at the rug at his feet.

"No," he said, "I should simply fail. I 'm not capable of it. Don't try me again. You would only have one more disappointment. You have taken me by surprise now. I cannot readjust my ideas quickly enough to know how far I could follow you, but even if I did see to some extent with your eyes, I could not do the work as it ought to be done."

Kate did not contradict him.

"You don't think me unkind?"

"You, unkind!" he cried. "It was your kindness that made the mistake of giving it me to do, and you are kinder still in letting me off it."

It seemed as if they could not part and could not speak. The deep affection between them warmed the atmosphere of their silence. At last he began in a quick, low voice:

"Find somebody else. . . ." Then he checked himself. "No," he went on, "I will speak the truth. It may sound like hurt vanity, but it is n't that. Could anybody do it? Is it not too strange and too

intimate a thing to be dealt with quite truly in literature? Can it come into a frame with all its strange absence of proportion and perspective? It seems to me at this moment that it can only be understood. . . ." He stumbled, and his colour deepened as he broke through a deeper reserve in trying to express what was by no means clear to himself. "It can only be understood," he repeated, "however dimly, by opening windows into the Infinite."

He was not in the least prepared for what she said next.

"I have already decided not to give it to anybody else,"—she spoke quietly—"and I cannot and will not do it myself. There are things I cannot put into words, that I can convey to no one else half as well as to you, and after all, how little I can convey to you! Those things must be left on the other side of silence. I have learned at last that I must leave much alone. All my life I have been too anxious to take responsibility on myself. As I see no possibility of making Horace understood I shall leave the matter alone. After all, no Life of him could tell the whole truth, and half the truth would be a lie. Better no biography at all than a false one."

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